

Developing Collaborative and Innovative Leadership: Practices for Fostering a New Mindset

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*Again and again
Some people in the crowd wake up.
They have no ground in the crowd
And they emerge according to broader laws.
They carry strange customs with them,
And demand room for bold gestures.
The future speaks ruthlessly through them.
Rainer Maria Rilke (1899)*

Abstract

“We live at a hinge time in history, a threshold time when societies and cultures are being recomposed. We are learning that the way life used to work—or the way we thought it should—doesn’t work any longer” (Parks, 2009, p. xv). This article is about learning, culture change, practice and leadership. Many wise minds have articulated the leadership mindset we need for the future, and what remains stubbornly elusive is *how* we get there. We believe the difficult challenge of developing a new mindset--a new view of the world--to address the complexity and dynamic nature of the 21st century is of central importance to leadership education today. As Einstein famously conveyed, we cannot address the problems of today with the same mindset that created those problems. Our inquiry explores the following questions: “*How* do we develop the skills, capacities and consciousness necessary for bringing creativity, innovation and a new mindset to our most strategic and pressing organizational challenges? *How* do we practice our way into a new paradigm of leadership?” We invite you to join us in this inquiry into leadership.

Hearing the Call of Leadership

*Again and again
Some people in the crowd wake up.*

You have spent significant time, energy and expense trying to understand and implement ways to stay competitive, seize opportunities, and work with unforeseen and emerging challenges. You concur with the insights from IBM's Global survey of 1,500 CEO's that explains how, "more than rigor, management discipline, integrity or even vision -- successfully navigating an increasingly complex world will require creativity" (IBM, 2010, p. 1).

We are grateful for the brilliant advisors from our nation's top academic and business institutions that guide us in working with complexity and rapid change, and affirm that we need to "think differently" and develop an expanded mindset. And yet, *real change remains elusive*. If we are clear on the diagnosis that innovation and creativity are essential to our ability to survive, adapt and thrive, what remains to be seen is *how* our teams, organizations and communities can practice and expand their skills and capacities to develop a new, more adaptive leadership mindset for the 21st century.

Within this paper we will introduce our newly defined leadership mindset of Collaborative and Innovative Leadership (CIL) and the lesser-known action research method of Collaborative/Cooperative Inquiry (CI) that can facilitate a pathway of practice for evoking the skills and capacities of a CIL mindset. Collaborative and Innovative Leadership (CIL) is a mindset in which the world is perceived as a diverse web of connectivity and relationships. Authoritarian leadership and an adherence to linear thinking and rigid structures still have a role under certain conditions, and yet that mindset has been expanded to include consensus based, self-managed teams that value synergy and initiate change emergently. This expansion reflects the ability to adapt to the greater complexity and chaotic conditions of today. Diverse feelings and perceptions are invited into group conversations as people practice deep listening, dialogue and discussion with empathy. These practices and this worldview cultivate fresh thinking, innovation and creativity.

Admittedly, developing a new mindset is a significant challenge. Our practice and research with over four hundred action research leadership participants from all sectors of the economy has encouraged us about how CI creates a unique and robust path for living our way into the new leadership mindset of CIL as small groups learn and create new cultures together.

A New Mindset for New Times. Before we move to a further exploration of CI, we want to better frame the challenge we face in shifting our prevailing worldview towards what we are identifying as a CIL mindset, and how it fits and expands upon the current leadership mindset. We then explore the specific elements that we imagine could be present within such a worldview.

Mindset is defined as “a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations.... an inclination or a habit” (Farlex, 2013, p. 1). That we each live within some kind of prevailing personal mindset is a given. Our mindset is comprised by the confluence of our beliefs, feelings, values and attitudes, which guide our decisions, behavior and actions in the world. It is precisely the deep-seated dependence we have on our mindsets, which can open or close the possibilities we see in life and work, that make transformation so difficult.

We are fortunate to be living in a time when many extraordinary minds (“some people in the crowd wake up” - Rilke, 1899), are bringing increasing insight about the nature of the challenges we currently face, and what elements we need from an expanded mindset. At Harvard Business School, Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky (2009), have honed and developed the powerful distinction between technical and adaptive challenges, and explain, “What is needed from a leadership perspective are new forms of improvisational expertise, a kind of process expertise that knows ... how to experiment with never-been-tried-before relationships, means of communication, and ways of interacting that will help people develop solutions that build upon and surpass the wisdom of today’s experts” (p. 3). In order to shift our mindset, the “process expertise” and “never-been-tried-before” insights are not the result of just taking in more information. As Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey (2009) explain, [W]e need to take individual *and collective* (italics added) learning at work to the next level if we are to meet twenty-first-century change challenges. If we do not, we can learn and reflect as much as we want, but the changes we hope for, or that others need from us, will not happen because all the learning and reflecting will occur within our existing mindsets. (p. 5).

Some of the other “people in the crowd” that we see helping us collectively us “wake up” include Joseph Rost (1992), Peter Block (1993, 2013), Meg Wheatley (2006), Joanna Macy (1998), and Riane Eisler (1987). We have learned a great deal from many authors and practitioners and appreciate their contributions to envisioning a CIL mindset.

Transforming Our Mindsets. As we work to understand how one’s mindset can be transformed, we appreciate the work of Jack Mezirow (2000), who articulates a theory of transformative learning, which explains how expanding one’s mindset or “habits of mind” leads to being “more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective” (pp. 5-6), where adults engage “life with a greater degree of self-determination” (p. xii). We are also reminded of the work of Thomas Kuhn, who published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962, which popularized the use of the word paradigm. According to Kuhn (1962), a paradigm or mindset is not simply the current theory in fashion. A paradigm is the complete pattern of thought in which a particular worldview rests. Kuhn makes the point that until a new paradigm is understood, all science and conventional wisdom work to justify and defend the existing paradigm (Paxton, 2010). Herein lies the challenge of not just learning new skills, but creating a new pattern of thought that results in a new mindset or paradigm. Kuhn’s theory also suggests that resistance to change is a natural part of the process. We ponder, how do we begin to understand this shift in paradigms articulated by Kuhn? What does this mindset of CIL look like? How can we see and define something that might literally be beyond our current understanding?

Edgar Schein has spent his lifetime helping humans better comprehend the connections between individual and group mindsets; patterns of thought; culture and leadership. Schein (2010) also helps us understand how a shift in mindset is something much more powerful than acquiring additional skills within our current mindset. For example, he points out that our current mindset is a more conservative force, which seeks to make life and decision-making more controllable and predictable.

The various predictions about globalism, knowledge-based organizations, the information age, the bio-tech age, the loosening of organizational boundaries, networks, and so on have one theme in common. We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like, except that it will be different, more complex, more fast-paced, and more culturally diverse. (Schein, 2010, p. 365)

As Schein (2010) asks, “What would a culture look like that favored perpetual learning and flexibility” (p. 365)? We propose CIL as a glimpse into that future.

As we inquire into the life experiences necessary for transforming and expanding our prevailing mindset, we wish to gratefully acknowledge how our existing mindset has been of service for centuries, and the knowledge it has brought to humanity is vital and important. Our current predilection for stability, equilibrium and prediction has been essential to our survival. As we think of transformation we envision the new CIL mindset as a cumulative expansion of where we are today, one that builds upon, not discards, our prevailing mindset.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that the stakes are admittedly high when we talk about transforming mindsets, and their corresponding cultures, within our organizations. One indicator of our collective search for something like a CIL mindset is the sheer size of the economy that is dedicated to enhancing leadership. According to Mike Myatt of Forbes Magazine, “U.S. businesses spend more than \$170 billion dollars on leadership-based curriculum” every year, and he goes on to add, “and we aren’t getting the results we want” (Myatt, 2012, p. 1). With so many resources at stake, we believe it is time that we broaden our inquiry and experimentation on how we move ourselves collectively forward.

Key Ingredients of a New Mindset—Collaboration, Learning and Leadership. Before we continue, we want to clarify and reiterate how pivotal collaboration is for developing a mindset that supports creativity and innovation. Collaboration is a word with which we are all familiar, and yet we suggest that in our prevailing, hierarchical, individualistic mindset, where leadership is tantamount to positional authority and answers come from the top, we don’t get much practice with true collaboration. Our experience in developing collaborative teams has reinforced how the prevailing mindset of individualism and top-down management actually suppresses creative collaboration with its inherent and understandable priority on reaching organizational homeostasis.

In contrast to the prevailing mindset where *leaders* are synonymous with those in positional authority, we think of *leadership* more broadly and inclusively, as an action in the world that can arise from anyplace within a given system. In this way, *leadership* is a social process representing a verb, not a noun. We view leadership development as a whole system’s capacity to collectively meet current challenges and adapt well to the future. Leadership and the skills of leadership development should be practiced at all levels of an organization, as a

cornerstone of organizational culture. According to Schein (2010), culture is developed as members of a group learn together as they work with problems of external adaptation and internal integration:

“The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems. . . , which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2010, p. 73).

Schein notes “culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin, in that leaders first start the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations. After cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership. . . .” (2010, p. 22). His writing helps us see the relationship between culture change, leadership and the development of a new mindset.

Signs of this paradigmatic shift in how we understand a new leadership mindset are being voiced in a variety of places. Garth Saloner, Dean of Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business, discussed the new challenges that businesses face in our increasingly interdependent world. When asked what employers are seeking in graduates, Saloner (2010) explains, “What they really tell us they need are leadership skills. It’s what you might think of as ‘soft skills,’ or people skills. Those are the things that are in short supply in managers who [employers] want to rise to the most important and significant ranks in their companies. (p. 1)

We understand Saloner’s “soft skills” as leadership skills that help individuals and teams collaborate, in order to deliver on a culture of innovation and creativity. Effective collaboration is pivotal for the expanded mindset of CIL, and the idea of collaboration challenges some of our most cherished stories about who we are in the world. Our goal to build collaborative teams has often relied upon further developing the under-appreciated interpersonal skills—the emotional intelligences—of empathy, respect, compassion, congruence, authenticity, honesty, flexibility, listening, accountability, vulnerability and the ability to successfully deal with conflict. We will explore these leadership skills and capacities in some depth as we look at “Elements of the New Operating System” later in this article.

In more traditional organizations, collaboration of the type Saloner expounds upon can be thought of as a kumbaya intention, and viewed cynically as faux optimism of team harmony and agreement. We are not extolling kumbaya here. We believe that true collaboration involves high-level intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that include seeking diverse opinions, engaging in healthy conflict, and building the capacity to synergize participation toward innovative results that go beyond the insights of one person.

As we reflected upon the experience of over 400 participants and continued our research and writing about the CIL mindset and how we develop our capacity to operate within such a mindset, we came across an article by John Kotter in the November 2012 Harvard Business Review, which offers a remarkably supportive framework for strategically developing and practicing with a CIL mindset in today’s organizations.

A Both/And Solution, Dual Operating Systems

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Kotter (2012) begins by explaining the same challenge we find many of us are facing: The hierarchical structures and organizational processes we have used for decades to run and improve our enterprises are no longer up to the task of winning in this faster-moving world. In fact, they can actually thwart attempts to compete in a marketplace where discontinuities are more frequent and innovators must always be ready to face new problems. (p. 46)

How do we develop a new mindset for leadership when people in organizations are already stretched to the breaking point? Kotter proposes running two systems that operate concurrently, and his framework ignited a sense of possibility within us. Kotter (2012) distinguished two strategic organizational tasks: (1) the need to continue to run our organizations within the existing paradigm of management—essential to our continued day-to-day survival—and (2) the need for organizations to create a *second operating system* devoted to the design and implementation of creative strategy, one that uses an agile, network-like structures and a different set of processes, skills and capacities. So, how do we create and run such a system? Kotter’s conceptualization of a second operating system is precisely where we see the potential to practice CI in order to develop a CIL mindset. We see CI as a “different set of processes” needed to move our organizations towards lasting culture change.

Kotter’s (2012) envisioned second operating system continually assesses the business, the industry, and the organization, and reacts with greater agility, speed, and creativity than the existing traditional hierarchy, which was built to flourish under different, more stable conditions. Indicating a shift in mindset, Kotter significantly notes that the dual operating system is not an *either/or* idea—it’s a *both/and* idea. Kotter’s operating systems reminded us of what Alan Briskin (1998) called “preserving systems and purposeful systems.... [that] complement each other.... Both are necessary, and yet both can become destructive if either one is carried to an extreme” (p. 230). What does that 2nd operating system look like in practice?

Elements of the New Operating System: CIL

*They carry strange customs with them,
And demand room for bold gestures.*

As you might imagine, CIL, isn’t for everyone, or, we might say, “not everyone is ready for CIL.” Even when we can feel the need for new approaches to leadership, what exactly are we aiming for in our efforts to develop leadership for the 21st century? What are the signs of readiness that an organization is poised to move into practicing with a process designed for collaboration, innovation and supporting a new paradigm of leadership? In working over many years with hundreds of people new to CI, we have found these essential elements that contribute to a CIL mindset.

1. **Acute Need for Innovation:** Organizational leadership realizes that there is an acute need for innovation and creativity. This is understood as an urgent strategic initiative and commitment to leadership that supports experimentation, risk-taking and learning.
2. **Capacity to Build Mutual Trust and Respect:** Politics are present in all human organizations. In highly hierarchical organizations, it can be difficult to foster the necessary trust. As a result, the politics are often fiercer the closer to the top one resides. The ability to talk about the dynamics and set them aside for the benefit of learning and practical action is crucial.
3. **Willingness for Learning and Change:** Organizational leadership is willing to invest in learning and understands the need to challenge and possibly change existing individual, team and organizational mindsets. We need the ability to let go of established identities and allow for the emergence of new patterns of working together. In order to transcend our current paradigm of leadership, we need to develop the ability to see ourselves within our current mindset, as a precursor for developing a more expanded view.
4. **Commitment to Navigate Chaos and Discomfort:** Change and innovation are by definition meant to upset the patterns in which we are most accustomed to operating. Readiness for embarking upon a CIL mindset would include the ability to stay present and committed, even in the face of chaos, not knowing and discomfort.
5. **Diversity:** The voices of stakeholders (inclusive of diversity of age, race, gender, roles, responsibilities, etc.) are included in the make-up of the CIL group. A CIL mindset is one where all the necessary voices can be brought to bear on complex, multi-layered challenges, which takes big skills.
6. **Invite Volunteers:** To build a CIL, people should be choosing to do so freely. This alone is a big challenge to many hierarchical cultures, and tests the trust and openness of one's organizational culture.
7. **Participative Dialogue and Democratic Practices:** Interest in promoting dialogue and democratic practices at group and organizational levels can be time consuming and counter-intuitive when we are operating under the extremely competitive pressures of today. While such collaboration can take time, the benefit of being able to move more quickly to decisions down the road is the payoff.
8. **Openness to Tap Other Ways of Knowing:** It can be counter cultural within many organizations to engage one another with metaphor, games, poetry, drawing, movement, etc. (Paxton, Van Stralen & Zweig, 2003). While most in our society value linear thinking, many are challenged to explore non-linear activities and thinking, and creativity depends upon it. If fresh answers matter enough to our shared outcomes, CIL members need to be open to seeing where and when knowledge emerges from unaccustomed places.
9. **Authenticity:** In the midst of chaos, authenticity might mean acknowledging that, "we don't have the answer." The culture of over-confidence and "being right" is a direct threat to the development of a culture of inquiry, experimentation and learning. It is extremely helpful for participants to have or be willing to develop expanded group participation and emotional intelligence skills. CIL will also help foster and hone these interpersonal skills as a result of the shared inquiry.
10. **Belief in Wholeness and Relationship:** We assume that participants working to create a CIL mindset have an underlying belief that the challenges of the world require us to bring more of our whole or multiple selves to work, which means that traditional personal and

professional boundaries may shift as people get to know one another better. What relationships do we need to have in order to meet the challenges we are facing?

11. **Be Positive and Assume Good Intentions:** This simple philosophy helps tremendously when people are taking risks and trying to shift to a more adaptive culture of learning and inquiry. Appreciative inquiry practices can help a group support new behaviors of risk-taking.

These elements of a CIL mindset are not absolute, nor easy to assess. While many of us may aspire to having such skills, we are all a product of the existing systems of which we are a part. There is ample evidence to suggest that until we feel the pain keenly enough, our organizational culture may well resist change, in spite of the desires of those within the organization that already know that different leadership preparation will be needed to meet the demands and opportunities of the future. Perhaps a strong willingness to engage differently with one another at work, and a desire to take responsibility for our own learning and professional development could be described as an essential ingredient for a CIL mindset.

As CI participants are also part of the traditional system, they can become an important vehicle for change, ultimately influencing the organizational culture, with less threat and more understanding of the existing operating system.

Fostering Sustainable Organizational Change with CI

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We believe Collaborative Inquiry (CI) is an effective engine for fostering innovation, leadership and lasting organizational culture change. As we began to write this article, we were co-teaching a course called Sustainable Organizational Change in the MA in Leadership Program at Saint Mary's College of California, a course that we have taught together 15 times over the past seven years, with more than 400 working adults of all ages from the public, private and non-profit sectors. We have found that action research, in particular the more radical form called Co-operative Inquiry (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 1985, 1997, 2008) or Collaborative Inquiry (Bray, Lee, Smith & Yorks, 2000) provides a unique opportunity for participants to engage in practical actions that simultaneously fosters expansion of our existing mindsets, promotes the expansion of individual and group professional skills, and creates conditions for leadership, innovation and creativity to flourish within teams and organizations (Yorks, Aprill, James, Rees, Hoffman-Pinilla & Ospina, 2008).

Collaborative inquiry (CI) is defined as, "a systematic process for learning from personal experience consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer a question of importance to them" (Bray, Lee, Smith, and Yorks, 2000, p. 6). The CI process operates through cycles of action and reflection as inquirers jointly explore pressing challenges, opportunities and practical action informed by both linear and non-linear thinking. With CI, groups learn to think together about issues of shared importance, as they learn to self-manage and transform their creative ways of working together. In particular, we

have observed these qualities of CI that help foster innovative outcomes, leadership development, and lasting organizational culture change.

- a. **Shared Leadership:** CI's demand for shared leadership forces new ways of interacting and experimenting within a group, which can lead to new patterns of group thought and behavior.
- b. **Participation by Choice:** People within a CI are typically volunteers, which bring freedom and choice to the workplace. People who join a CI want to be part of the solution, and can often sense the limitations of the current mindset.
- c. **Systematic Learning:** As a form of action research, CI brings systematic cycles of action and reflection, which focus the team on learning and practical application of what they are learning.
- d. **Practical Outcomes:** While theory is helpful, for CI "the primary intention [is] to develop practical skills to change the world" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 281). This focus on practical outcomes is hugely important to organizations seeking to survive and thrive in the 21st century.
- e. **Multiple Ways Of Knowing:** By multiples ways of knowing, we mean knowing that goes beyond the conceptual and intellectual realm, to include art, metaphor, movement, storytelling and mindfulness practices. CI's demand for using multiple ways of knowing requires participants to step out of their comfort zones and more fully engage the left and right sides of their brains simultaneously when inquiring and innovating together.
- f. **Creating a Culture of Innovation:** The need to establish and remain aware of new group norms helps eliminate bureaucratic rules and fear of making mistakes while encouraging experimentation, meaningful risk-taking, and offering the opportunity to test-drive a new culture on a small and local scale.
- g. **Methods for Improving Quality of Knowing and Action:** CI's unique validity procedures push the group to be conscious of both process and content; action and reflection; and practical outcomes and group dynamics. These components of emotional intelligence are practiced upon a playing field where balance and equilibrium of the field is continually investigated and named.
- h. **Practice Field for Chaos:** CI's adherence to the creative necessity of exploring and engaging with chaos invites a new relationship to the dynamic change faced in many organizations today.
- i. **Collaborative Skills:** CI's requirement of a more relational style of leadership integrates intrapersonal and interpersonal skills necessary for navigating the dynamic and creative future.
- j. **Presence and Mindfulness:** CI brings the benefits of focus to the group level as group members learn to focus together and communicate more effectively in real time.
- k. **Sharing Power:** In CI, every voice matters and shares power in conducting the inquiry.

In sum, these are qualities that we have discovered that help promote breakthrough experiences that can foster learning towards a new and expanded mindset. The power of the CI is in the shared experience that individuals have within a group setting. CI cultivates a new collaborative and innovative leadership mindset (CIL) that includes expanded individual and group skills that result in the capacity for organizational members to see and act on previously unseen opportunities. We suggest that you experiment with a CI group, as nothing but the experience itself can convey the practice and practical application of what is possible.

Adaptation and How to Practice for the Future

The Practice of Adaptation is Built Within the Process. We believe that CI and the goal of moving towards a shared CIL mindset offer a unique process/practice for the expansion of more effective and practical leadership development and cultural change. We also see the need for CI to be adapted in order to support more teams and organizations within their existing cultural mindsets. As John Bray, Joyce Lee, Linda Smith, and Lyle Yorks (2000) describe, “One of the tenets of cooperative inquiry is that although there are parameters that define the practice of cooperative inquiry, there is no dogmatic way to conduct a cooperative inquiry” (p. 5). For a group within an existing organization to hold such ambiguity is often a challenge, particularly when we are accustomed to operating with clarity, efficiency and confidence at work.

Though the field of action research has long been utilized successfully within our current hierarchical and traditional organizational mindsets, the more radical cousin of CI is generally not recommended for such situations. CI can be viewed as too dramatic, too open, too uncertain, too difficult and too ambiguous for people working with stressful, urgent and complex situations. In an organizational setting with a traditional management mindset, we find a skilled facilitator who can best support the CI process is an essential ingredient for getting started.

CI in the Workplace – An Example. One brief example of adapting CI to current organizational conditions is reported by Van Stralen (2003), who facilitated CI as a learning strategy with six executive health care professionals who worked within a changing industry and fast-paced work environment that was oriented toward cost cutting while maintaining high standards of care (Van Stralen, 2003). These managers were responsible for the intensive care unit and medical-surgical services in an acute care hospital. Each manager was highly experienced and accountable for large budgets and staff. Each faced enormous budget cuts and needed to keep the quality of care high while reducing costs. Their organization was in peril and many doubted that it would survive. How would they transcend the economic challenges, industry chaos and the deeply ingrained, pre-existing organizational culture to provide high care and build organizational morale? They began with the idea to address the problem of isolation and fragmentation in the workplace. Their shared inquiry question became, “How do we communicate in order to promote a culture of mutual respect and cohesiveness among management and staff from all departments, shifts and facilities?”

The CI volunteer participants began with a deep and voluntary commitment to address shared challenges, and found time in their over-crowded leadership schedules to collaborate through eight cycles of reflection and action over four months. The learning spiraled through three identifiable phases in the group’s development. In the first phase the group members attempted to improve communication and mutual respect by identifying ways to “fix” the staff who reported to them. After engaging with an action in their work units and reflective talking together about their individual experiences with the outcomes, the six managers realized that they needed first to work on communication, respect and trust among themselves, as the leadership team. The focus on self as instrument of leadership became the work of the second learning phase. After growing in their understanding about each other and developing new skills in how they communicated, the managers entered the third phase of learning. In this third and

final learning cycle they used their new individual and group capacities to build community throughout the hospital (Van Stralen, 2003).

Group members called their emergent creativity “popping conversations” and talked about their heightened levels of energy and enthusiasm. One of the managers explained, “You are throwing out ideas. The “popping” is the creativity. I mean it ‘s like popping out ideas. You don’t necessarily take every idea. You build. It was like building upon building blocks.... It was more energized.... It was different from brainstorming. It was a more excited kind of conversation. (Van Stralen, 2003, p. 170)

The outcomes of this facilitated CI learning program included a shift in mindset from isolation to connection as executive team members more fully integrated themselves and their staff into the delivery of patient care, the building of a team culture through the development of mutual trust and respect, the emergence of fresh collective action out of generative conversations, and a sense of “presence” to one another – evidence of a new mindset. As one of the managers described her experience with the CIL program, “[T]his program helped create more trust for our team.... we are now thinking of ourselves as one big team or one big hospital” (Van Stralen, 2003, p. 172).

Practice for the Future. To recap, we began this article by talking about more effective ways to bring leadership in the 21st century. We discussed the need for innovation and creativity, and the improvisational expertise—collaboration—that represents the fulcrum of skills needed to develop a new mindset, and move towards a new organizational operating system. We talked about leadership education, and how it has been approached traditionally. We introduced the learning strategy of CI and offered highlights of one case study. We now want to further explore how to prepare people to succeed in this new environment of heightened complexity and rapid change. We believe the how of effective leadership development can be found within the nexus of inquiry, innovative leadership, and collaboration.

We don’t see CI as a panacea of organizational effectiveness. However, in working to collaborate within a CI, we bring life to Kotter’s description of a second operating system, one that can be practiced alongside the important work of day-to-day management. We shift our conversation to the question of, “What does it take to shift our organizational cultures to more effectively adapt to the world of the 21st century?” CI is surely not the only answer, though we believe it offers a bridge of practice that is worthy of further experimentation and reflection.

In Conclusion, and Getting Started

*They carry strange customs with them,
And demand room for bold gestures.
The future speaks ruthlessly through them.*

We believe that many of us are hearing the world’s call for a new kind of leadership that evokes innovation and requires bold gestures. Aiming with intention to foster a CIL mindset and utilizing CI as a strategy for learning is one way for us to practice together. This essential work within groups, teams and organizations is human, flawed, evolving and emergent. Acceptance of

these very characteristics offers us a pathway for creativity and risk-taking that causes understandable resistance within a hierarchical mindset. We believe that the time for collaborative and innovative leadership, with an emphasis on experiential and experimental learning, is coming of age. As Kotter (2012) proposes, we will need a multifaceted organizational structure that can meet the needs of today, while preparing us for the future. “For now decisions are upon us, and we cannot afford delay.... We must act; we must act knowing that our work will be imperfect” (Barack Obama, Inaugural Address, 2013).

We see CI as a container-creating process that can help us foster the skills and capacities needed to help us navigate this “hinge time” (Daloz Parks, 2009, p. xv) of organizational life. In our opening summary we invited you to join us in exploring the following questions: “*How* do we develop the skills, capacities and consciousness necessary for bringing creativity, innovation and a new mindset to our most strategic organizational challenges? *How* do we practice our way into a new paradigm of leadership?”

Having explored these questions as you read about CIL and CI we now encourage you to explore the benefits of CI within your own team(s), learning environments and organizations. One place to begin is with Peter Reason and John Heron’s helpful “Layperson’s Guide to Cooperative Inquiry” (1999), which lays out the theory of CI as simply as any resource we have encountered. Next, we encourage you to find a talented facilitator of action research, who can help create and hold the space for the second operating system to grow and flourish within your organization. We also invite you to be in contact with us, as partners in leadership change and development. We see this hinge time as a place where organizational members, educators, consultants and coaches will also be striving to bring more collaboration forward in their work. We too are a part of the current mindset, and we must also find new ways of being creative and building with others. We welcome your participation, wisdom and input as we move forward to create the organizations and communities, which can help people realize opportunities for collaborative and innovative leadership. We are interested in what you are learning, please be in touch.

In the words of poet Wendell Berry,
*It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.*

The world is calling, and the time for action is now. Let us proceed together, as we think of the words of Dr. Clare Graves (1978), who attributed this quote to Stanislaus Sanoff of Rice University, “The twilight in which we live is not the twilight before dark, but before dawn.”

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