

Afterwards

Merrelyn Emery

March 2010

When the ruins of our industrialized society lie scattered across the planet there will be a few picking amongst the rubble, trying to eke out their lives. Inevitably there will be a constant theme running through all the discussions as people collect to shelter at night – that theme will encompass a thousand whys?

Why did we continue to allow the oil to be pumped, the coal to be mined? Why did we continue to throw away the products of the Earth – the plastics? The fabrics? The metals? The food? The water? Why did we persist in living in such a way when we knew it would end like this? Why was there so much apathy and alienation? Why did so many people opt out of their communities by retreating into private lives or indulging in escapist fantasies through media and drugs? Why did we accept that corporations should put the short term financial profits of shareholder before the long term futures of their customers, employees and managers? Why did the employees of these organizations not protest that the profits were not being returned to the business, the communities in which they were needed and the planet whose resources they were chewing up? Why could not governments or politicians come together to avert the catastrophic destruction? Why could not people come together to force their governments to take concerted action?

As well as a thousand questions there will also be a thousand answers such as:

1. People naturally put their self interest and the quality of their individual lives first.
2. People believed it was natural to compete to have the best, to be competitive.
3. Status hierarchies are just natural.
4. Private enterprise is good. Free markets are good.
5. People believed that the planet was theirs, for the taking.
6. Governments believed it was right to look after the interests of their nation first, above those of the planet and all its inhabitants.
7. Governments or politicians simply didn't know any way of coming together other than in the representative structures and processes they had extolled as democracy.

All these thousand of answers are correct in some aspect. They are also superficial. They all hide one simple set of principles. These principles concern the way people organize their relationships to each other and take responsibility for that form of organization. Consider the following:

- People decide to form a status or dominant hierarchy – one person has rights over another. This is called the first design principle [DP1]
- People decide to be equals. This is called the second design principle [DP2]
- People decide they don't want a relationship. This is called Laissez-faire -

There are only 3 possibilities:

- When the structural relations between the people are dominant-subservient (DP1), responsibility for coordination and control is located with the dominant party. This structure produces competition and decisions are made on the basis of self interest.
- When the people hold equal status (DP2), responsibility for coordination and control is located with groups who work to meet a set of goals that contribute to the goals of the whole. This structure produces cooperation and decisions are made on the interests of the whole.
- When there are no structural relations between the people (*laissez-faire*), nobody takes responsibility for anything other than themselves. This produces similar results to DP1.

This same set of possibilities applies to our relationship to the planet.

Let us now examine the 7 answers to where we went wrong in terms of these genotypical design principles.

1. People naturally put their self interest and the quality of their individual lives first. History tell us that for most of the time that humans has been on Earth, they have lived in small cohesive communities or tribes in which individuals put the survival of the community first. They understood that only when the group or community was strong could the individual flourish. That is, for most of human history, the design principle was DP2. It was only at the beginning of the industrial revolution around 1790 AD that DP1 became widespread in the West.

To these ancient cultures, remnants of which still exist, the idea of putting their individual interests above those of the community would have been nonsense. It is only today after 3 centuries of the predominance of DP1 structures that people have come to believe that they are above their communities. This is because their ‘communities’ usually exist in name only. People in our Western industrialized cultures do not live in communities: they live either in small families of various types or as individuals.

As small isolated families or individuals, it is imperative that they look after themselves. They must by definition put their self interest first.

It is time to start recreating our communities now, from the bottom up, in neighbourhoods. Fortunately, this is quick and easy to do through Search Conferences. A Search conference is a carefully designed method which provides all the conditions people need for collaborative, creative planning for their future.

2. People believed it was natural to compete to have the best, to be competitive. When a society is organized on DP1, it induces competition by its very nature. As we gradually built this global culture based on DP1 where communities disappeared and families and individuals became isolated in their private lives, competition became the law of life. The rich competed to have the best. The poor competed to survive.

At the same time, the beginning of the industrial revolution, people for the first time also started putting the interests of people above the health of the planet. Or so they thought. Again, the ancient cultures would never have done this as they were highly aware that the Earth is their Mother and nourishes them. They were careful not to allow their populations size to expand over the limit set by the carrying capacity of the land they occupied. And they were careful not to damage that land in any way. They nurtured it.

We have lost the awareness that our interests lie in having a healthy planet. It is not in our interests to live on a planet that cannot supply our needs.

3. *Status hierarchies are just natural.* If a status hierarchy is all you have ever known, you are going to believe it is the natural order. Many people today do not know there is an alternative to dominant-subservient relationships and many when told there is an alternative, either do not believe it or believe it could work.

Not only have we lost our awareness that the Earth is our Mother, we have also lost knowledge of our true nature. We are a social species who is adapted to live and work as groups, as equals sharing responsibility for our future.

4. *Private enterprise is good. Free markets are good.* Yes. The problem lies not with private enterprise or free markets, it lies in the design principle that most private enterprises use (DP1). It is perfectly possible to have private enterprises built on DP2 as the history of sociotechnical systems shows.

Also, as long as humans have been on the Earth, they have been trading. It is only since the advent of the industrial revolution when DP1 was forced on the population at large that private enterprise has turned person against person, organization against organization and person and organization against the planet.

Many have hypothesized about the cause of the recent Global Financial Crisis (GFC). It has been variously blamed on big bonuses, rogue traders, incomprehensible derivatives and packages and deregulation. All of these are probably true but beneath them again, we see the operation of DP1.

Of course traders took risks to get bigger bonuses – competition is the endemic dynamic of DP1.

Of course its deregulation – DP1 financial systems only work when they are strictly and rigorously controlled by an external source. This is because they do not control themselves. When responsibility for control is not located with a group of people doing the trading, it is easy to evade control. When responsibility for coordination is not located with a group of people doing the trading, individuals can act alone. Rogue traders do.

Top management is believed ‘to be in control’ but as the GFC and innumerable other organizational incidents show, they often have no idea of what is actually going on in their organizations and nobody is about to tell them. Messengers get shot!

Why did nobody blow the whistle on the amazing derivatives etc that were so lucratively sold from trader to trader around the world with not a care for the consequences or the communities that would cop these consequences and pay the costs? Because when responsibility is not located with a group of traders with a comprehensive set of goals, responsibility is not taken, full stop. In DP1 structures, responsibility is always held at least one level up the line, up to the top – but see above. You cannot be in control of something you know nothing about. Trading funny money is an absorbing game played in financial organizations in the same way as office politics becomes the absorbing game that other managers play at the top of their organizations. No amount of external regulation will totally stop irresponsibility if it is not built into every level of the organization itself.

However, we should not neglect the case where the senior management does act either illegally or in such ways to distort the market and perceptions of the benefits to be gained from investing in their products. This is not always just to feather their own

nesses. It is also because they have to satisfy the shareholders who want bigger incomes.

So the other destructive dimension of private enterprise that springs from DPI is the notion of the shareholder who has no direct relationship to the organization or its workings. The shareholder's 'share' is financial only. The notion is 'vote and forget it.' In fact most shareholders don't even bother to vote.

The notion that a person who does not involve themselves in the productive work of an organization should be a recipient of the profit because they once lent money to the organization defies any common sense. Yet 'maximizing shareholder value' takes precedent over every other organizational goal. Every corner and cost that can be cut is cut because it will increase shareholder value. Every risk is taken because it will increase shareholder value. So babies died because melamine was added to milk products to increase their protein level and make greater profits.

The belief that people can profit from an organization without any responsibility for the day to day working of the organization has been shown to be destructive. There is only one solution to all this mess and that is to put responsibility for coordination and control right back where it belongs – with groups of people doing the work and/or the trading.

People who wish to lend money to a productive organization should have their capital repaid with interest after a certain period of time. The shareholder organization where the shareholders care only about their income and do no productive work in the organization must go.

5. People believed that the planet was theirs, for the taking. As we have seen under 4, people in DPI structures do not take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They become totally consumed by immediate self interest.

It is not only financial traders who have shown this pattern. It now applies in every industry. The fossil fuel industries do not like to be reminded that they are destroying large tracts of the planet and that inevitably, this has consequences. The Earth is an open system and the removal and transformation of matter such as the burning of fossil fuels radically changes the whole biosphere.

It is now over 50 years since we became aware that our use of fossil fuels was creating a problem with more heat being retained in the atmospheric rather than being radiated back into space, i.e. 'global warming'. And now somewhere around the world, every day, we are seeing the accumulating consequences of this in the immediate human terms of dramatic record breaking snow storms, rain storms, super cells, droughts, fires, extinctions, crop failures and higher prices. Beyond the everyday, glaciers are melting, the 3 major ice sheets are disintegrating and the circulation patterns and resources of the great oceans are changing.

Yet many in the fossil fuel industry are still spending millions, if not billions, attempting to convince the population that global warming is a hoax and that it's OK to continue with business as usual. Drill, baby, drill!

Why? Because like the financial traders, the only thing that matters is 'me' today.

As it is with the deniers in the fossil fuel industries, so it has become in individual human lives. Because so many people have only ever known dominant hierarchy in their formal organizations, it becomes a deeply embedded and unconscious belief

system. As it is Ok to put one person above another, so it is Ok to put a person above the planet.

People kill ants because they *might* get into their house. Diamonds are mined because they are pretty and shiny and last a long time. If we can afford them why should we not have them? Trees are cleared because the richer we get, the more meat we want to eat because eating meat is a status symbol. Why should we not have bigger houses than we need, that we need to air condition because they are so badly designed? Why should we not kill wild ducks every season, just because we can, not because we are hungry?

As these behaviours and attitudes show, our culture has evolved so that we have exercised more and more extreme dominance over the planet. Not only are we ripping more and more fossil fuels out of the Earth, we also have cities that are almost ecological wastelands. You can hear cars - but can you hear birds?

In some cities you won't hear many birds. Why? Because there is little for the birds to eat – why? Because every house, every yard and every public space has been sprayed with pesticide, insecticide and weedicide etc. Why? So that the 'bugs' won't annoy people. And the 'weeds' won't grow across the nice straight lines of concrete that so many people believe shows they are in control, and therefore, reassures them in their belief that they can actually control the planet, that they are above it.

As we have underpinned all our human relationships with DP1, so we have built our relationship to the planet on it as well.

How many people ever stop to think that every single thing they consume with the exception of sunlight itself, comes from the Earth? Similarly, how many people understand that every insect and 'weed' they kill is part of the fragile ecosystem that sustains them? Without bees and other pollinating insects, we go hungry. With acidic oceans supporting mainly jelly fish, we go hungry. Without glaciers and/or regular rainfall, we go thirsty. We are not above the planet. We are totally dependent on it.

6. Governments believed it was right to look after the interests of their nation first, above those of the planet and all its inhabitants.

Yes, because we have split the human population into little pieces, each seeing ourselves as nations or cultures or religions first rather than seeing ourselves as one species, Earthlings, that inhabit this planet.

We created the League of Nations that became the United Nations. It was designed as a representative, DP1, structure which induces competition and uses ineffective methods to try and obtain agreement.

The UN needs to be a DP2 structure and to use methods such as the Search Conference that work on commonalities not differences. If the UN sat around as equals and asked themselves the question "What have you seen happening to the planet in the last 20 years?" and put up the answers, the next question would be OK then, "Do we want to save our home?". Inevitably the answer would be "Yes". So the next question would be "What do we want the planet to look like in 2020?" Heterogeneous groups from around the world would go and work this out. They would put up their answers and the commonalities would be huge. They would then integrate them and rationalize any differences that had arisen. A few differences wouldn't matter to the end result as the commonalities to work on were so many.

So then groups based on geographical regions would go and decide what needed to be done to bring this healthy sustainable planet into being. They would do action plans that took into account their local diversity and that would bring about the beautiful healthy planet they want to see.

They would then go into a workshop called a Participative Design Workshop in which they would design a DP2 structure that ensured that the energy and motivation generated in the process so far would be maintained through the process of implementation. They would design in a timetable for progress meetings and solving problems if such arise.

If the UN had been a DP2 structure and worked with reliable participative democratic methods, global action on climate change, when it first became accepted as a scientific fact, would have solved the problem by now. Now we are running out of time and have no global agreement with none in sight as they are sticking to the same divisive methods that have failed so many times before.

The structure and processes of the UN must be changed.

7. Governments or politicians simply didn't know any way of coming together other than in the representative structures and processes they had extolled as democracy.

It is simply not true that there was no knowledge of an alternative to representative democracy based on DP1. Not everybody knew but in every culture there are people who know that there have been alternatives either in the past or that still exist in parts of their culture.

In the USA for example, there was at the time of writing the constitution a huge debate over what form the government should take. Unfortunately, the wealthy DP1 lobby narrowly won. In Canada there is widespread knowledge of the Iroquois constitution. In all countries with an Indigenous culture, there is a history of how to effectively work things out and make decisions. Participative democracy and government is possible and modern forms have been worked out.

Since 1790, DP1 became widespread and then extremely fashionable. It serves the interests of the rich and the already powerful and excited the aspirations of those saw themselves above the rest. Representative government is also DP1 in action.

We have seen and are seeing its consequences.

Now is the time to start getting together as citizens of planet Earth.

