Social Change Through Multi-Generational Dialogue

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"The root of our global crisis, more frequently than not, is a crisis of leadership" (Pór, 2008a, p. 14). This very well might be the foundation of the difficulties we face as we approach social change globally. We are depending on old paradigms of leadership which fall short of what we need as we organize to address the complexity and challenges of our world. Depending on older leaders who bring forth the knowledge and experience of leading in a world that no longer exists to train and develop emerging leaders is one of the artifacts we need to challenge if we are going to be able to act effectively to create the needed social changes to create a healthy world. Older leaders stand to learn just as much from younger leaders as younger leaders have to learn from older leaders. This paper proposes that we can transform leaders of all ages by bringing them together in multi-generational dialogue to address the pressing questions that we as people, organizations, and societies face now and into the years to come. Pór, a pioneer in collective intelligence, explains the old paradigm as well as what we can expect by changing the paradigm when he explains,

> In hierarchy-ridden social institutions [or any organization]....the meaning making function
> is attributed to the top. Times of exponential expansion of knowledge and complexity call
> for a new, more capable mode of the social organization of meaning. When this happens,
> we won't be drowning in information while longing for wisdom (p. 11).

As we bring generationally diverse leaders into dialogue around questions that are critical to our future, we provide a framework for community intelligence to emerge. And when we add to this a global perspective that understands that all things are interconnected, we have the

opportunity for global wisdom of the group to emerge and it is this group wisdom that will

provide us the direction to move forward. As group wisdom is one of the important outcomes

that this paper hopes to highlight, let's define what we mean by group wisdom and why it is

different than collective intelligence. Atlee and Pór (2006) provide a us with a picture of the

difference between collective intelligence and wisdom. They start by explaining that collective

intelligence is not always wise and it is wisdom that we need which then leads us into their

explanation of collective intelligence and wisdom. They say

> In relation to intelligence, wisdom can be viewed as an expanded perspective and
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> motivation that embraces more of the whole of the situation being considered. Collective
>
> intelligence is wise, then, to the extent it successfully embraces whole systems in all their
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> complexity and contexts; the interests, capacities and perspectives of all stakeholders and
>
> of the systems, themselves; full, relevant, and nuanced information about the situation; the
>
> whole of who we are as human beings; any emergent realities and creative possibilities;
>
> and so on. The more that intelligence -- whether individual or collective -- embraces the
>
> whole of relevant reality, the wiser we can consider it to be.

As an example, in a dialogic processes such as The World Café (TWC), collective wisdom

is one of the expected outcomes. The TWC dialogic process has emerged out years of experience

coming together in small group dialogue to talk about the issues that matter most to people.

Diverse groups of people represent a subset of the system providing a global perspective where

wisdom emerges from the collective intelligence of the people in dialogue. As social change

through multi-generational dialogue is explored in this paper, the factors that support the belief
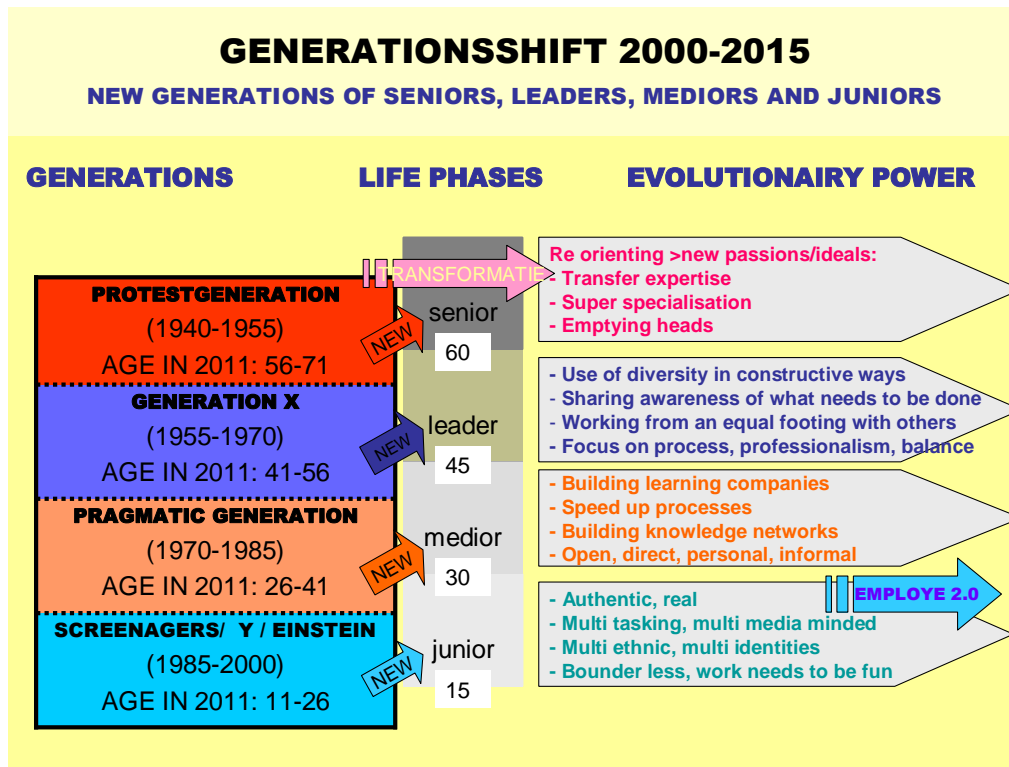
that the results may be wiser when the diverse perspectives represented in a dialogue are multi-generational will be defined. Simply stated, as diverse generations, we are wiser together.

What are Generations?

Since it is proposed that multi-generational dialogue can enhance our ability to foster social change, it is wise to define what we are talking about when we talk about a generation. The press is full of articles on this generation or that generation with a variety of date ranges describing the ranges of the generations. There is some consistency but the ranges shift depending on the author. It can be confusing to try to grasp what a generation is and how it is defined given the disparities. As someone interested in inter-generation communication, I have collected close to 50 articles on the topic and none of them fully explain what a generation is nor do they fully agree on when a generation starts and when it finishes. The disparity between the articles can be frustrating and confusing. To reduce this confusion I have turned to the work of Dr. Aart Bontekonig to bring some clarity to the concept of generation and why it is important to the conversation of social change through multi-generational dialogue.

Generations go through different phases of their life just as individuals do (Bontekonig, 2011, p. 2). A generation is not simply an arbitrary date range attributed to a period of time, it follows a 60 year life cycle based on 15 year phases. A new generation starts every 15 years and brings a new set of attributes to the world. Based on the research of Bontekonig the following generational designations are used to describe current generations in the workforce: Protest generation or Boomers (1940-1955); Generation X (1955-1970); Pragmatic generation (1970-1985); and the Screenager, Y, Einstein, Millennial generation (1985-2000) (Bontekonig, p. 3).

There are four 15 year life phases that every generation goes through while in their working years and as each generation consists of a 15 year time span, at any point in time there will be four generations in the work force each living in a different phase of life. It is worthwhile to note that in each of the phases, a set of phase attributes are common to each generation. As well each generation is shaped by the world into which its born. As leaders in the older generation start to transition out of organizations their power will slowly diminish and as newer generations enter leadership their power will slowly progress. Understanding these transitions is critical to understanding social change through multi-generational dialogue. "Every generation has the natural tendency to update the surrounding culture....during every next stage of life. The difference with the preceding generation creates the social evolution" (Bontekonig, p. 3). The easiest way to see the patterns and the generations is to use the model created by Bontekonig. The graphic below will explain the differences in the phases as described above.

GENERATIONSSHIFT 2000-2015
NEW GENERATIONS OF SENIORS, LEADERS, MEDIORS AND JUNIORS

GENERATIONS   **LIFE PHASES**   **EVOLUTIONAIRY POWER**

TRANSFORMATIE

PROTESTGENERATION
(1940-1955)
AGE IN 2011: 56-71

GENERATION X
(1955-1970)
AGE IN 2011: 41-56

PRAGMATIC GENERATION
(1970-1985)
AGE IN 2011: 26-41

SCREENAGERS/ Y / EINSTEIN
(1985-2000)
AGE IN 2011: 11-26

NEW

senior
60

leader
45

medior
30

junior
15

Re orienting >new passions/ideals:
Transfer expertise
- Super specialisation
- Emptying heads

- Use of diversity in constructive ways
- Sharing awareness of what needs to be done
- Working from an equal footing with others
- Focus on process, professionalism, balance

- Building learning companies
- Speed up processes
- Building knowledge networks
- Open, direct, personal, informal

- Authentic, real   EMPLOYE 2.0
- Multi tasking, multi media minded
- Multi ethnic, multi identities
- Bounder less, work needs to be fun

Illustration 1: Social evolution created by new generations in each phase of life

According to Bontekonig (2011) in organization and social structures based on

hierarchical leadership models, newer generations are only able to contribute as much as the older

generation allows. The older generations can choose to support the tendencies of the emerging

generations which will update the surrounding culture or they can block these tendencies and

effectively stymie social change. In a time of rapid change and complexity as we are now

experiencing, slowing down or blocking the input of newer generations of leaders can be

devastating to the social changes that are needed to address the complexity and challenges faced

by our organizations and societies. Bontekonig says,

Each generation needs the support of the other ones to complete their destiny in improving the culture, be it in a company or in society....when a generation is not supported in a company, the leaders of this generation – about 15% of the generation – often leaves this company soon. The followers stay and adapt to the ongoing culture. Which means that the culture of this company will not be updated and slowly loses its vitality and inevitably will 'die' (p. 5).

In a multi-generational dialogue model of leadership, all leadership voices from all generations are engaged and it is through this ongoing multi-generational dialogue that organizations and societies are more likely to unleash the wisdom needed to thrive in the fast paced and complex world in which we live. The old model of hierarchical leadership has been replaced in thriving organizations with a more inclusive model of leadership. "The focus of leadership is shifting from dominance and convincing, to shared awareness and 'co-creation' [and] to explicit attention to the development of authentic professionals while working" (Bontekonig, 2011, p. 11). A critical theorist might consider the old model of hierarchical leadership to resemble the oppressor dominating the oppressed which would fit the pattern above of blocking the expression of the emerging generation to maintain the current culture. Freire (2009) illustrated this circumstance when he said "Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in 'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them', for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated" (p. 74).

One of the defining factors in the current youngest generation is its tendency to not automatically accept the current culture which makes them somewhat more resistant to

oppression and control. Older generations who attempt to maintain the status quo find this new

generation of independent thinkers to be difficult to deal with. However this new generation

stands ready to help us implement the needed changes in our thinking and actions that will help

address the cultural changes needed in the world. We need only embrace them and their ideas.

Bontekonig says "The youngest generation....has a strong tendency to stay authentic, which

implies that there is a high probability that they will not adapt to (old-fashioned) features of

companies" (p. 15). Our willingness to embrace and support the wisdom of emerging leaders has

a big pay off for social, government, and economic organizations. Bontekonig provides this

example to illustrate the point:

> Some of our experiments showed that we could change the corporate culture of endless
>
> meetings within one hour, just by consistently following and supporting the youngest
>
> generation in their design of the meeting. I used the same method using the youngest
>
> generation as the designers of the process in a larger strategic project. In both cases we
>
> created a higher work-flow through parallel actions, direct communication and informal
>
> and personal interaction which resulted in a huge saving of time, up to half of the time that
>
> was usually needed for those activities (p. 15).

 With these kinds of results it is worth exploring why it is that fully embracing all of the

generational leaders in our organizations and in society creates such positive results. It is not that

emerging leaders are simply let loose to do what they will any more than any other leader, it is

that they are included in an authentic way in the ongoing local conversations within the

organization. Understanding generations and their importance to social change now provides us

with the foundation to further explore social change through multi-generational dialogue.

The Mental Model That Must Change

The rationalist model has been the foundation for organization and leadership studies from their inception and it has had and continues to have a profound impact on how we act in organizational settings. Gergen and Thatchenkery (1996) state that "...these assumptions have been realized in major conceptions of the individual and the organization emerging from organizational study since virtually its inception." Our positivist/rationalist heritage has also provided the Western culture with a knowledge transfer mental model that can make it difficult to embrace multi-generational dialogue in a leadership setting because it sees knowledge as an entity to be given rather than constructed. This mental model is not exclusive to the Western culture but it has set the tone of how we view experts in our culture. This mental model is synonymous with the expert model of knowledge transfer. In the expert model we sit at the feet of experts who then teach us what we need to know.

Government, universities, family structures, faith based organizations, as well as many businesses are based on the expert model. In the university classroom the professors are there to teach, the learners to sit and learn. In government, we either hire or elect those who are experts and we are supposed to step back and let them make the decisions and govern. The patriarchal family is led by the male in the household who makes the decisions. We go to our religious organizations to be told how to interface with God, what to believe, and how to believe. And in organizations we hire expert managers who are supposed to know how to manage and lead while we follow. The expert leadership model is also the most common leadership development model

that organizations follow. After years of work in organizations of all types, the common pattern of

developing leaders is to provide training, coaching, and mentoring. All of these strategies assume

that the teacher is the expert and the emerging leader is the one who needs teaching. Von Forester

(2003) provides an excellent example of the expert model where knowledge is an entity to be

given away. He explains

> Historically, I believe, the confusion by which knowledge is taken as substance comes
>
> from a witty broadsheet printed in Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century. It shows a seated
>
> student with a hole on top of his head into which a funnel is inserted. Next to him stands
>
> the teacher who pours into this funnel a bucket full of 'knowledge,' that is, letters of the
>
> alphabet, numbers and simple equations (p. 201).

The problem with the expert model is that it assumes that the expert actually can give

knowledge to the learner, the expert knows more relevant knowledge than the learner, the expert

knows what she is talking about, the learner does not have knowledge to contribute, and that the

expert knows what knowledge to give the learner. These are a lot of assumptions. With learner

centered adult learning theory (Galbraith, 1998; Schunk, 2000), communication perspective

communication theory (Pearce, 2007), and with the multi-generational dialogue model of

leadership development there are other models that provide contrary theories to the bucket model

of knowledge transfer. Freire (2009) refers to this antiquated model as the banking model.

"Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the

world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a

spectator, not re-creator" (p. 75). All of these models are experiential Kolb (1984) in nature, they

mostly embrace conversation as experience Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2002), and they understand

that knowledge is socially constructed (Ford, 1999; Krippendorff, 1993). This is in stark contrast

to the dominant discourse where the outcome of change is a concrete entity. Ford (p. 486)

addresses this difference when he says "The adoption of a conversational perspective to the social

construction of reality requires an alteration in our understanding of what constitutes 'a change'."

For social change through multi-generational dialogue to flourish, we must let go of the expert

model of knowledge transfer and embrace the concept of socially constructed knowledge through

conversation as experiential learning.

Why Not Any Dialogue for Social Change?

Dialogue is an important starting point for a conversation about social change but not the

end of the conversation. Dialogue is a good starting point because we go beyond discussions and

debate. In the Western culture dialogue has been de-emphasized and discussion and debate have

taken center stage. Discussion and debate are so prevalent in our culture that they seem like water

to us, we do not even notice that they tend to be our dominant form of conversation. It is not that

discussion and debate are bad, they serve an important purpose, it is that they do little to break

down barriers, build understanding, generate new knowledge, and build trusting relationships all

of which are necessary to insure the collaboration needed so that we can solve the complex and

challenging issues that our world faces.

It would be helpful to understand the differences between these types of conversation if

we are going to promote dialogue over the others. Although the use of the words that denote

human to human interaction are used commonly, often they are used inconsistently and the

inconsistent use creates confusion as to the purpose of an interaction. Before getting to the question Why not any dialogue? it will be useful to explore what the words of communication mean and why dialogue stands out as a platform for social change.

My work can be described as conversational leadership and I have focused on conversation as the mode of communication that is of most interest to me and where I feel most effective in creating transformation in others and communities. Historically I have used conversation to mean two people engaged in an intimate dance of deep curiosity about each other. It is the type of communication that tends to suspend time and when one emerges, the world seems to have stopped. In this context conversation must be preceded by caring and curiosity or it will not take place. In *Con versare: To Dance Together* Inman (2002) conversation is explained as "Talking together in conversation is far more than people expressing opposing points of view as in a discussion; it is truly a dance in which people turn around together in a heart felt sharing of ideas, feelings, and emotions" (p. 2). Isaacs (1999) uses the word conversation to mean the root of a variety of ways to communicate. He uses a decision tree model with conversation as the base and other communication processes such as deliberation, discussion, debate, and dialogue branching out based on the pattern of conversation.

To help clarify the meaning of conversation for others that I interface with in professional settings, I have adapted Isaacs' (1999) model into a simple explanation and have left my definition of conversation to the practice of conversational leadership or talking together in intimate settings. In the simplified model I have equated conversation with talking together. When we talk together, that conversation can take many forms.

- Deliberate: To weigh or consider well – A deliberation is the foundation of most government public engagement and business conversations. Deliberation is the process of talking together with the expressed intent of weighing alternatives and then making a decision.

- Discussion: To smash apart, to scatter and more recently to examine or investigate – A discussion is the communication pattern we often fall into in our Western culture. A discussion is the process of examining each parties position with the intent to convince the other of the rightness of a position. The word discussion is almost universally used to mean talking together in our culture. Much to my dismay it is often used in the dialogue and deliberation field to describe dialogue.

- Debate: To dispute, to fight, to beat – A debate is well understood in our Western culture. We are taught debate and we are expected to be good at debate. There are opposing positions in a debate and the intent is not a give and take but positions are hurled at each other. It is not by accident that in the current political climate, we speak of the political debate. There is no interest in trying to understand the others position and the debate rarely changes anyone's mind. Often points are scored and tracked as in a competition.

- Dialogue: Originally rhetorical but now to listen and understand – Dialogue is most similar to the first definition of conversation but not exactly the same. Dialogue is emergent, a process to open up ideas rather than make a decision. Dialogue helps participants understand each other, positions, situations, and breaks down misconceptions and misunderstandings. It is in dialogue that new knowledge and wisdom are co-generated.

Dialogue builds trust and relationships which form the foundation for people to move together to solve the issues of the world.

With the above grounding we can now answer the question Why not any dialogue? Granted that if we were to do nothing but shift from discussions to dialogue in our Western culture, we probably could transform the world. However that transformation may be too big to take on in the next 100 years. As the desired impact is to foster social change in our current world, the conversation in this paper is specific to the proposed adoption of multi-generational dialogue as that is perceived to be able to make a difference more quickly. If it is not clear as to why we need to include all generations in dialogue to create social change, Gorman (2007) provides an example of what his generation, the Millennial Generation is bringing to the table. It would be foolish to put roadblocks in front of a generation that brings such a powerful message.

All across the world we are waking up, answering the urgent call of our time, and connecting our unique gifts with the healing and renewal of life on Earth. We are the conscious-alive, planetary-active, spiritually-awake members of a new global generation. From across borders and continents, spanning oceans and time-zones, bridging languages and cultures, we are the largest and most diverse generation ever to be born, and we are coming together to create an unprecedented movement for whole-systems planetary change.

Now that generations have been explored, the value they can bring defined, and now understand why we must move away from the expert mental model that so prevalent in the Western culture, an exploration of social change and what that entails will be necessary to inform

our inquiry.

Transforming Societies and Business Cultures

It seems that the trap that many of us fall into is that we do good work yet what we do does not always create the social changes we envision. We might create a local change but when we step away it is not sustainable. We often attempt change in a system enacted over the years to produce exactly the outcome we are getting. Doing good work within a system that structurally counters our efforts can be frustrating and it could create the illusion for practitioners that they are making a substantial difference when in fact they are not. The approach to social change addressed in this paper does not have a set of guarantees for success but it is venturing down a path that could have a positive impact if further explored. There is already work being done in multi-generational dialogue to generate social change and further exploring what this might look like may produce more clarity to the process and why this is so important. The foundation of this approach is to create containers where collective intelligence emerges. "...collective intelligence is a holy grail of social change and social creativity. If we could better understand how to support it, increase it and facilitate it, we would be more able to effectively co-create a better world" (Atlee and Pór, 2006).

Developing informed and engaged citizens is only part of the solution. There is extensive research about who participates in our political process but who participates is only part of the process of change in a society (Melville, Dedrick, & Gish, 2011). In each generation the definition of civic engagement is being rewritten. As well civic engagement changes within a generation as that generation goes through the stages of life as outlined above in the conversation about

generations. There is evidence for instance that indicates that the Millennial generation considers

engaging in community service to be synonymous with civic engagement in the democratic

process (Melville, Dedrick, & Gish). The focus on community service is confirmed by Gorman

(2007) when he says "We are marching through the streets, speaking truth to power, and

transforming our world through community service projects that help those in need." This is not

only Gorman's voice but the voice of his generation.

      If the Millennial generation feels that community service is a sufficient contribution to

society, how do we create the break through changes needed for social transformation to address

the complex and challenging circumstances in the 21th century? As the political process seems to

be unattractive to many in the Millennial generation, simply relying on political participation to

enact social change does not seem to be a likely way to make that change happen. Community

service alone does not seem to create the impact needed for social change. Although social

networking has proved to be a powerful way to connect those interested in transformative change,

there must be a strong enough injustice to move thousands of people to action as there has been

recently in North Africa and yes this may not be sufficient to create sustainable cultural change,

particularly in the Western world.

      Traditional ways of organizing for social change may not be able to respond quickly

enough to the dynamic and fast paced social movements in our complex world. What we do see is

the escalation of voices from each side of an issue moving the political and social landscape one

way or another and these changes are happening at a speed that simply did not occur 40 years

ago. And the changes seem to be escalating. The question must be asked Do we see a permanent

change in the social landscape or do the changes follow cycles of movements and counter

movements? Some movements such as a womens right to vote and an end to slavery do not see a

return to the past, but other hard won rights often see their positions erode as positions are

framed and re-framed. Do these swings in culture follow generational attributes and values?

Maybe a research study might emerge out of these questions. When Dr. Bontekonig, the

generational researcher referenced above, was asked this question in a recent correspondence, the

author replied "The question can be put another way: is the group or are the people or are the

people in this (sub)culture moving in their own evolutionary direction or path/road, in their own

opinions?" If the notion that cultural change follows generations is taken seriously, this might

provide the motivation for leaders to insure that the values and attributes of the emerging

generation of leaders are able to make the impact anticipated. If they are allowed to fully

contribute to our organizations and societies, the cultural changes that are necessary to thrive in a

complex and challenging world very well may emerge more quickly. Dr. Bontekonig mentioned

further in the same communication "Another important point is that cultural change is created by

the carriers of the culture, the group members themselves."

Considering that cultural change might be created by the carriers of the culture, focusing

on giving all generations a voice is critical if we want to support social change. The more we

dampen the voice of the emerging generation the less likely we are to foster social change. Since

the majority of people in any series of generations are working together in organizations, is it

possible that social change can be encouraged by creating containers for collective intelligence

and wisdom to emerge through bringing multiple generations together in dialogue? If we accept

the premise that the diversity of perspectives found in generations will enrich not only the

conversations but the knowledge and wisdom that can emerge from those conversations, then

exploring multi-generational dialogue as a contributor to social change is in order. Pór (2008b)

provides support for this thinking when he says,

> A human group or social system is wiser if it can think and act from a broader perspective
>
> and care for a larger whole with all of its parts. Without this expanded perspective and
>
> care our minds are caught in a maze of linear causalities, and thus we are incapable of
>
> making sense of the intricate patterns of the looming, extinction-level dangers and the
>
> corresponding evolutionary opportunities for transformation.

It seems that we have been looking at fostering social change in society in the same

manner that we have looked at creating change in organizations. In organization studies we have

been living under the illusion that we actually can design and control change and to engineer the

outcomes we specify. This illusion comes from our strong realist heritage in the Western world

and this same belief may permeate social change studies as well. This might be an interesting

research study. By gauging the recent events in the Middle East, predicting and engineering social

change is no more likely than being able to control the world monetary market. The complexity of

the social systems and the extent of the challenges we face should be bringing us back to look at

our realist paradigm and consider other options. Stacey (2010) explains,

> There is a dominant discourse in which it is assumed, without much questioning, that small
>
> groups of powerful executives are able to choose the 'direction' their organization will
>
> move in, realize a 'vision' for it, create the conditions in which its members will be

innovative and entrepreneurial, and select the 'structures' and 'conditions' which will enable

them to be in control and so ensure success (p. 1).

In Stacey's book (Stacey, 2010), he challenges the rationalist paradigm and advocates for

a new focus on local conversations, conversations like we might have in multi-generational

dialogues. As he says, regardless of the position in the organization, the vast majority of actions

are born in local conversation with just a few people. "...we need to move from fantasizing

about what organizations should be like and seriously explore the reality of organizational life in

our experience and the way we might think about what we already do" (p. 2). It is the contention

of this paper that if these conversations, conversations that we already do, were multi-

generational, the outcomes would be more powerful and better able to enact the cultural change

that we need in our world today. This might be how to move cultural change forward without the

belief in the design, control, and prediction of outcomes that we so often see in our current reality.

Brown, Isaacs, and Tan (2008, p. 32-33) frame this well when they say, "We are convening a new

reality when we invite the generations to sit down and talk together. By engaging the power of

conversation as a core process for conscious evolution, we have the opportunity to explore

innovative approaches to social change that can help us act wisely— beyond 'us' and 'them.'"

Pulling it All Together for Our Future

If we do what we have always done we will get what we have always got. We can no

longer afford to continue down the same path that got us to where we are. The world is too

complex and the issues too challenging for us to ignore the evidence that is before us of a better

way to lead. It is not that older leaders simply need to include emerging generations in decisions,

it is that older leaders need to shift their mental model of how to lead and how leadership is developed in others. Stacey (2010) says that he finds it "...difficult to see how we can continue to avoid questioning dominant thinking about organizations and their management in view of what has been happening in both the public and private sectors of our economies around the world" (p. 22). The dominant thinking that Stacey speaks of is the rational thinking upon which the Western world is built which includes the expert model of leadership. In further talking about the failure of investment capitalism and managerialism in the public sector Stacey says "It is extraordinary both that this should have happened and that there is so little evidence that dominant management prescriptions achieve what they are supposed to, given the sheer volume of research on organizations and their management" (p. 22). Another model of leadership is clearly necessary before we can start to address these complex challenges that we face as a nation and as a world.

My conviction is that sustainable organization effectiveness is led by leaders who's practice is rooted in dialogue. This conviction forms the grounding for the exploration of social change through multi-generational dialogue. Leaders who understand the critical role of dialogue can have a profound impact on the performance of any organization particularly in creating cultural change within the organization. This goes well beyond the current climate of teaching leaders to manage the generations differently. At a recent multi-generational event at The Institute of Authentic Leadership, the hosting team was a mother and son team. The mother Mary Stacey is an international consultant with a focus on authentic leadership and her son Kalin Stacey a university student. Lyn Hartley wrote an article about the event in Hartley (2008). She captured Mary Stacey's thoughts when talking about struggles her clients faced trying to use the managing

generation model. "Their talking past each other rather than learning from each other had real implications for business performance. While many companies are paying attention to managing the different generations, Mary wonders how we could collapse differences by developing capacities for intergenerational conversation, collaboration, and leadership."

The foundation for multi-generational dialogue is the opening up of space for all generations to fully participate in the critical conversations that are happening locally (Stacey, 2010) throughout our social, government, and business organizations. If we do open up space for all generations to fully participate in local conversations, the quality of the questions we ask will most likely improve. We will not be blinded by limiting ourselves to one generations perspective. Hartley (2008) quoting Mary Stacey noted that even in designing an event there can be an improved outcome. "Having youth involved in the design of this event has really broadened the questions we are asking." If we continue to see the generations through the eyes of the older generations we will continue to miss the opportunities to engage all generations in multi-generational conversations and harvest the wisdom only together they can generate for transforming our world.

All to often when older generations try to do the right thing and reach to out to include younger generations in dialogue, they act to create the container for the conversation and then hope that they get a representative group of generational leaders. In an organization setting it is easy to compel all generations to show up, but it is not showing up that is important. We need everyone's hearts and minds and this will take a shift in our mind set as well as changing how we call and host meetings and events. Having committed and engaged generational representation

often can come from having the hosting and calling team for the event to be multi-generational as well. Kathy Jourdain experienced strong multi-generational participation during a leadership event and discovered that the reason for the diverse turnout was based on the hosting and calling team, it too was multi-generational. She related this experience in Jourdain (2011),

> We became aware that the composition of our group was directly related to the composition of the hosting and calling teams and I realized this was likely true of all the hosting teams I'd been on. As an example, in Brazil last October, the local callers and hosts were all young and the majority of people who showed up were young. In the future, I know I will be paying even more attention to the composition of the hosting and calling teams in relation to the purpose and intention we are calling in and the richness of the intergenerational exchange.

Rather than generational diversity being an add on or an afterthought, we need to elevate multi-generational dialogue to 'this is how we do things' in our organizations if we are going to leverage the extraordinary talents of all of our generational leaders. It is easy for those of us who are used to calling the shots to overlook a simple but powerful practice such as having a generationally diverse hosting and calling team for every event. However it is our attention to collective intelligence details such as having a generationally diverse hosting and calling team that will help insure that we have the hearts and minds of all of our generations focused on addressing the challenges of our world. Atlee and Pór, (2006) state the need for this fundamental shift in leadership when they say "We believe that it is time to think of collective intelligence as a generic capacity that is vital for our times..." Hartley (2008) referencing the collective intelligence of

multi-generational dialogue quotes Mary Stacey saying "Building our intergenerational leadership capacity may lead us to a new common ground." Not only can common ground be the outcome of multi-generational dialogue, building the relationships that are required to work together to address complex and challenging issues is also an expected result.

Working in social, business, and government organizations is not the only setting for multi-generational dialogue. Public engagement strategies are being implemented across the Western world in an effort to re-energize participatory democracy with the hoped outcome being a more informed and engaged electorate and a more responsive government (Melville, Dedrick, & Gish, 2011). Most of these efforts are deliberative in nature and the exploration of dialogue could be a benefit to public engagement efforts. Research efforts are also focused on how to get our Millennial generation to move beyond community service and embrace the political process in an effort to bring their voices to public engagement (Melville, Dedrick, & Gish). Multi-generational dialogue is also playing a role in getting the generations to engage together in the political process. D'Innocenzo (2008) noted that "Our experiences, illustrated by a variety of our projects, show that intergenerational endeavors foster more attentive, informed civic engagement and a level of respect, empathy, and appreciation among the different age groups" (p. 17). If this is an indication of what can be achieved using a multi-generational dialogue approach, it may be worth exploring in the broader public engagement work being done around the world. This might be an important strategy to improve the performance of our local, state, and national governments and foster social change at the same time.

As noted in the conversation about collective intelligence, multi-generational dialogue can

not only improve collective intelligence but can not only generate wisdom that goes beyond the

wisdom of one generation, it can generate the wisdom we need to lead in the complex and

challenging world in which we live. Mary Stacey offered insights to support this when she said,

> We have an opportunity to engage all the generations in conversations about our complex
>
> global challenges and our mutual interest in social change. One of the questions that Kalin
>
> contributed to our design conversation was, 'whose wisdom and values are we paying
>
> attention to?' The answers to the questions that will impact 'seven generations to come'
>
> can only be found if we recognize that wisdom isn't contingent on how many years we've
>
> lived" (Hartley, 2008).

Conclusion

The difficult issue of fostering cultural change in a complex and challenging world has

been the focus of this paper. It has been proposed that there is an alternative to the practice of

designing and controlling culture change in our organizations and social change in our society and

the alternative is fostering social change through multi-generational dialogue. The reason that

social change through multi-generational dialogue has been proposed is the belief that we need to

unleash to full potential of all of our generations to address the complex and challenging issues we

face. This study has been an interesting exploration since the people who have informed the study

did not for the most part come through typical research channels such as journals or books. A

direct outreach to multiple communities of dialogue and deliberation professionals slowly yielded

little nuggets of wisdom coming in the form of 'why don't you contact this person, they may be

able to help, or I saw your post and I think that I can help.' Through the process of multiple

conversations a picture of social change through multi-generational dialogue slowly began to emerge. The picture really took hold after reading the paper from Aart Bontekonig on generations. In particular the insight that each generation brings with it the seeds of change and that by blocking a generations expression of who it is, the very social change hoped for is diminished.

The roadblocks blocking social change also began to be reviled. Those of us who have already progressed through the stages of our generation often block the very leadership wisdom that we need for social change by assuming that emerging generations must learn from us what it is to lead and by doing so depress the extraordinary knowledge, skills, and attributes that we need to enact change in our organizations and society. It seems counter intuitive, the more we try to control, the less we are able to positively influence change. Only through bringing together our bright and passionate leaders from all generations into multi-generational dialogue do we have a chance of creating the change we need to thrive in the complex and challenging world in which we live. Holman (2010) states this well when she says,

> The capacity to engage diverse perspectives creatively may be the evolutionary leap that our current social and environmental crises are forcing. Handling so much complexity wisely means that we can't do it alone. Although wisdom may be expressed through an individual, it is not a solo act. It involves our relationships with each other and our environment. Wisdom lives in the collective. Knowing how to bring together difference and stay connected is a critical skill for our times (p. 176).

A young multi-generational dialogue leader who works closely with the Wiser Together

Initiative of The World Café captured the hopes of so many of us when he reflected after a multi-generational World Café that he hosted "What started as an experiment to see if two groups of people at different stages of their lives could find a place of connection turned out to be the beginning stages of a community that wants to work together in efforts to change the world. If this dialogue could be done, why not that?" (Feinstein, 2007).

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