RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships

Frances E. Andrews

The Reflective Human Action leadership theory promotes the principles of accept chaos, share information, embrace vision, and develop relationships. This article focuses attention on "develop relationships" because relationships are the basic building blocks of the universe, the very fabric of groups, the information and communication networks of organizations, and the key to taking charge of change.

Background

As we approach the new millennium with changes occurring in competition, technology, organizational structure, information transfer, and demographics, we realize that relationships at all levels must change. The old ways of relating to people as "collections of replaceable parts capable of being reengineered" (Wheatley, 1997, p. 21) are not working. New ways of relating and bridging differences must be fostered, and we must work tirelessly to create environments that enable positive correlation between participation and productivity.

We know from systems theory that relationship is the vehicle for turning the inputs—human energy, partnerships, teams—into positive outputs: cooperation, trust, satisfied workers, retention of skilled talent, a healthy workforce, satisfied users of our services. The quality of our relationships determines the potential for the synergy needed to be creative, to encourage "out of the box" thinking, and to remain responsive to the many challenges facing all of us. Today, more and more individuals and groups are discovering that the capacity to act together is inseparable from the ability to think and reflect together. Wheatley (1997, p. 22) summarizes this concept as follows: "People organize together to accomplish more, not less. Behind every organizing impulse is a realization that by joining with others we can accomplish something important that we could not accomplish alone. . . . Every living thing seeks to create a world in which it can thrive. It does this by creating systems of relationships where all members of the system benefit from their connections."

The quality and type of relationships within our organizations define the culture that, as we know, influences the level of available human energy. Consider the nature of relationships in a control paradigm culture, characterized by suspicion and narrow-minded, judgmental behaviors. People get the message that they are unacceptable unless they follow, without question, the dictates of the positional leader. If they try to step outside of this paradigm and challenge this cultural belief, they are blamed, intimidated, verbally reprimanded, and accused of "covering up and being uncooperative." As a result, people experience the deep, personal, "soul disconnecting" pain that results from being poured through the control paradigm's mold. In order to survive in these types of organizations, many individuals consciously put aside who they are and become what the control-paradigm systems expect—uncooperative, adversarial "cogs in a machine to be used and controlled" (Smith, 1996, p. 20). Thus, any relationships they form are negative.

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In organizational cultures where input is sought and people are valued for their contributions, relationships develop very differently and exhibit distinct qualities. Individuals rely on themselves and their team members. They organize into horizontal, flexible networks, rather than vertical, rigid hierarchies, around the work to be accomplished. They use information and communications technology to keep people informed. By their actions, they enable each other to contribute maximally to the enterprise. In other words, individuals develop a shared understanding of what's important, what's acceptable behavior, what actions are required to accomplish the organizational goals, and how these actions will get done (Wheatley, 1997). People develop channels of communication, webs of inclusion, and new and creative ways of working collaboratively with

each other. In these types of power-with organizations, people exercise initiative, creativity, and innovativeness—all of which stems from their deep personal desires to contribute. People are engaging in meaning-making and the goals of the organization are met. Obviously, the relationships, which individuals in power-with environments form, are completely different from those observed in power-over situations.

Personal Relationship

In order to realize and develop this personal, interpersonal, and organizational energy, characteristic of power-with relationships, we have to start by knowing ourselves. An individual's authenticity, ethical sensibility, and spirituality directly affect relationships with other people as well as the ability to accept responsibility to work collaboratively with others to accomplish a common purpose. By knowing and understanding who I am and what I can do to be more competent, I can be more trustworthy—a necessary trait for others to trust me. Knowing myself also allows me to know,

understand, and value the diversity of others. With more trust comes the ability to communicate effectively and to realize the value of synergistic relationships. Too, "self organization is optimized when relationships are both real and rich" (Caine & Caine, 1997, p. 248).

Interpersonal Relationships

Hughey (Griggs & Louw, 1995, p. 210) articulated the value of interpersonal relationships:

> I need relationships to cocreate. If I'm by myself, the only thing I bring to the table is what I have. It can be meager or it can be bountiful, but it's only what I have. Only through relationship, only through interacting with you, can we transform that bounty into something that's bigger than both of us.

Participation with others in relation brings with it a sense of strong connection and belonging, both of which are supportive of the health and vitality of the individuals and the organizations to which they belong. As Wheatley notes: "Organizations

that have learned how to think together and that know themselves are filled with action. People are constantly taking initiative and making changes, often without asking or telling. Their individual freedom and creativity become a critical resource for the organization" (1997, p. 25). With feelings of connection and belonging with others in our organization, we can participate fully in synergistic relationships and contribute significantly to our organizations.

Relationship between and among individuals is not something that is static and fixed. Neither is it something that is fostered by tinkering with incentives, retraining groups, revising policies and rules, or designing another organizational chart. Relationships between and among people develop because people realize that they can benefit from their connections with each other (Wheatley, 1997). Griggs notes (1995, p. 215): "We become our fullest selves only through relationship and through reflecting on our responses to the relationships we form."

The overall quality of this relationship between people is determined by how each individual behaves in relation to other individuals. People need to know what "right" means and have the courage to do the "right" thing even when the "system" makes it uncomfortable (e.g., refusing to respond angrily and negatively when you challenge a power-over paradigm by presenting facts and data and your boss accuses you of cover-up and collusion). People need to

become aware of their responsibility not only for the technical aspects of their work, but also for the "interpersonal, political, and ethical effects of their actions" (Quinn, 1996, p. 76). As Breton and Largent (1996, p. 191) note: "All the techniques in the world won't help us build good relationships[with each other] if we lie, intimidate, manipulate, and [control]."

Relationship Enhancement

Developing positive relationships is paramount to taking charge of change. Let's identify some examples of relationship-enhancing or team-building patterns that are applicable across many cultures. A fuller discussion of these and relationship diminishing patterns is found in Griggs and Louw's book, *Valuing Diversity* (1995, pp. 218-241).

1. Individuals in an organization feel that they are wanted, that their contributions are eagerly sought, and that their ideas are considered valuable—Organizational culture, an accumulation of all the relationship patterns that went before, has a tremendous influence on the quality of relationships people form. Cultures that are open, understanding, flexible, inclusive, and trusting encourage individuals to relate to, understand, and value differences. In these cultures, every relationship deserves respect and enriches the lives of the individuals involved.

2. Individuals rely on the ethical sensibility, integrity, strength, and ability of others —Trusting

others is dependent on being trustworthy ourselves. In this type of environment, individuals can be counted on to tell the truth, to do what they say they will do, to act with courage based on the principles of human dignity and respect, to accept responsibility, and to make authentic and ethical connections with others. Individuals give themselves and others the benefit of the doubt, they believe that people are responsible and can contribute in a variety of ways. They have faith in others and allow them to be responsible for the tasks they have been assigned.

3. Individuals demonstrate a willingness to hold themselves accountable for "their side of the street"—Personal accountability indicates our understanding of the fact that we can only change ourselves, we cannot change others. Use of the following phrases demonstrate to others our trustworthiness and integrity: "I must have misunderstood," I'm sorry," and "I realize I broke our agreement, and I would like another opportunity to make good on it."

4. Individuals are open and honest and their feelings, words, and actions are congruent, consistent, and genuine— Honest people, people with integrity, tend to be direct about what they want. A good relationship can survive the truth better than it can survive anything less than the truth. An open person tends to share information freely and is receptive to the input and feedback from others. An open

exchange of ideas and energy is perceived to be mutually beneficial. Truth and real understanding are more important than maintaining an image or a fantasy.

5. Individuals make conscious decisions to commit to relationships—Contributions, inputs, and suggestions of others are valued. Differences that affect life experiences, values, beliefs, and styles of communicating are respected and appreciated. Stereotypes and assumptions that might interfere with quality relationships are recognized and acknowledged. In other words, individuals seek a con-

nectedness of spirit that leads to the formation of true community with others. In their book, *The Paradigm Conspiracy* (1996, p. 31), Breton and Largent note: " . . . when our inner aliveness is allowed to resonate with the aliveness in others . . . we create communities founded on reverence for life, soul, freedom, and individuality."

It must be recognized that "Different cultures build relationships differently. . . ." (Griggs & Louw, 1995, p. 242). Relationships in power-over cultures are very different from those formed in power-with cultures. In power-over environments, people are not viewed as people. Their input is not welcomed, and they are not expected to think about or have any vested interest in their work, their department, or their company. Relationships that are developed often are adversarial and designed to destroy trust and respect.

In power-with environments, people express their comfort and discomfort with others according to cultural norms and express honesty, openness, and congruency differently. People are expected to contribute to the whole from the base of their personal authenticity, ethical sensibility, and spirituality. They are encouraged to vest in their work, their department, and their company. Typically, in these types of organiza-

tional cultures, people are excited and welcome coming to work—even on a Monday morning. They value each other and see diversity as a positive asset to their own personal professional growth and development. Regardless of the culture from which we come, in which we live, and in which we work, relationships with other people are based on the same features: trust, respect, and shared goals.

Summary

To recap, the relevance of relationships to leadership can be summarized as follows:

♦ Good relationships increase participation and productivity.
♦ Quality of relationships determines potential for synergy.
♦ People organize together to accomplish something important that they couldn't accomplish alone.
♦ Quality and type of relationships define the culture of organizations.
♦ Power-over means: people aren't viewed as people; input is not welcome; people are not expected to think or vest in work; trust and respect are destroyed; people rely only on themselves; hierarchies are rigid and vertical.
♦ Power-with means: people are open and honest; their acts and words are congruent; input is expected and valued; diversity is viewed as an asset to personal and professional growth; people rely on self and team members; networks are horizontal and flexible.
♦ Knowledge of self is the first step in relationship development.
♦ Quality relationships are fluid—changing, developing.
♦ Courage to "do the right thing" is
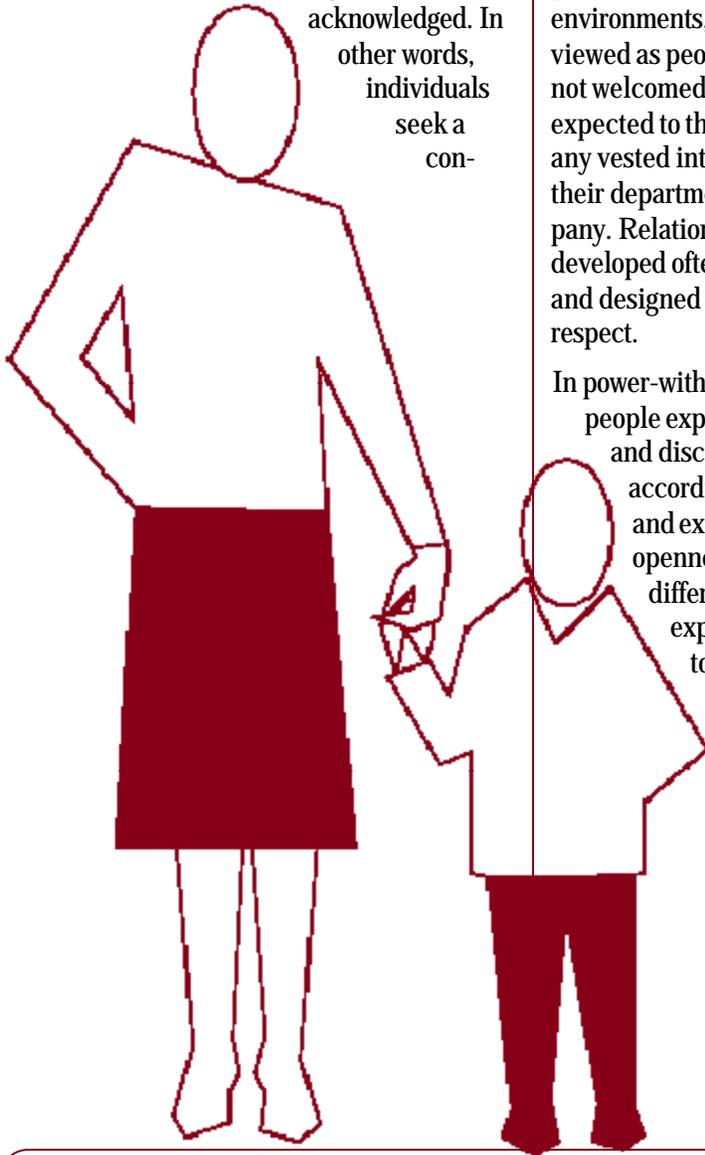
a necessary criterion for quality relationships.

♦ We can only change ourselves; we cannot change others.

♦ Relationships are based on trust, respect, and shared goals.

♦ Individuals seek connectedness of spirit that leads to formation of true community.

Corroboration

Bolman and Deal (1997) are optimistic about the prodigious challenges that face organizations of the future. Leaders, in addition to analytic abilities and a set of techniques, must "embrace the fundamental values of human life and the human spirit. . . . They will understand the importance of knowing and caring for themselves and the people with whom they work. They will be architects, catalysts, advocates, and prophets who lead with soul" (p. 380).

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Dr. Andrews is Professor and Chair, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Montevallo, Alabama.

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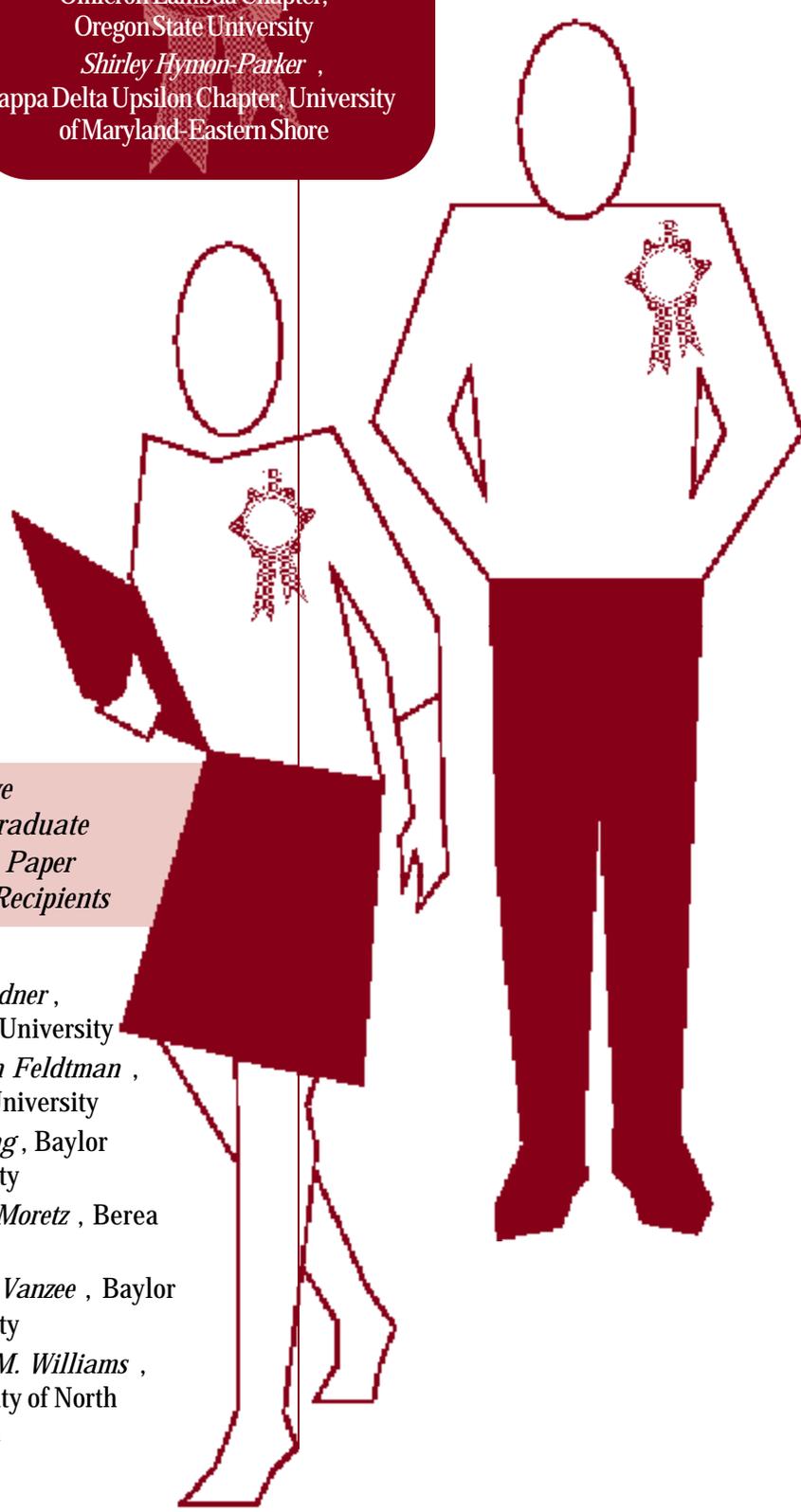
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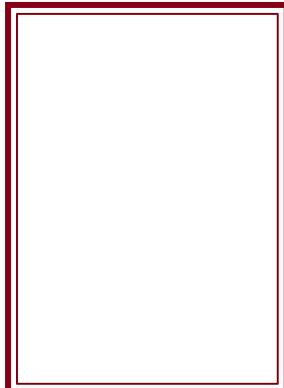
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Message from Janelle Walter
Chair, Board of Directors

The 1997 Conclave is history, and believe it or not Dallas showed off by greeting its Kappa Omicron Nu guests with mild weather. The theme of "Leadership for the New Millennium" featured student and professional workshops and presentations by Wilma Pitts Griffin of Baylor University and Gladys Gary Vaughn. Fun included the Texas Barbecue and a tour of Dallas and the West End Historic District. A giant birthday cake and clowns and a unicyclist helped us celebrate the founding of Omicron Nu 85 years ago and Kappa Omicron Phi 75 years ago.

The workshops were facilitated by Frances E. Andrews, Virginia L. Clark, Mary E. Pritchard, and Gladys Gary Vaughn. Focusing on Reflective Human Action, the workshops also featured the Community of Practice Change Process as a means for application of theory. The video, *Leadership and the New Science*, provided a dramatic explanation of the principles for establishing a positive environment for leadership. Through small-group activities, participants applied the principles and core features of the theory to chapter and organizational issues.

Congratulations to the award recipients listed elsewhere in this issue. Special thanks to the Adviser Award recipients, Shirley Hymon-Parker and Gerry Olson. Adviser support of members and chapters is essential to the well-being of Kappa Omicron Nu. We should also be very proud of the six students who presented research papers. Kudos also to Elizabeth A. DeMerchant and Scott Ketring for their superb service on the Board of Directors. We are excited to welcome the new Student Representatives: Norene Cochran, Carrie Fuller, and Kevin M. Taylor, and we are proud also of the other candidates: Jacquelyn Altimore, Elana Goodale, Amy Thornton, and Jennifer Vanzee.

Conclaves serve several purposes for Kappa Omicron Nu: leadership development, renewal of the bonds of Kappa Omicron Nu, and celebration of scholarship and excellence. The 1997 Conclave surely "filled the bill." And it is my pleasure to report that the young women and men of Kappa Omicron Nu are exemplary representatives of the next generation of professionals.