

Community Leadership

A partnership between community organizations and Libraries, Community and Voluntary Services Branch (LCVS), Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Wild Rose Foundation, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

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Thinking “out of the box” adapted from Ken Low/E.Dozois

We often use the phrase “think out of the box”. By saying this, we mean “Let’s get creative and move away from the conventional thinking.” But what is the difference between conventional thinking and understanding and innovative or adaptive thinking and understanding?

Conventional levels of understanding allow you to work efficiently *within established patterns of thought and action*, but they offer no capacity for diagnostics and design. Only incremental changes are possible at conventional levels of understanding. Innovation requires adaptive capacity – a deep understanding of how things work and why.

You can test this idea by thinking about your DVD player. Most of us know enough about our DVD players to make them work. We know how to make them play, how to make them record. Some of us even know how to program them... But what happens if they break? What kind of understanding is required to be able to diagnose the problem and fix it? What if we want a *better* machine? What level of understanding is required to improve the design?

Innovation requires a *deep understanding of how things work – and how they could fail*. We know this at some level. None of us would attempt to improve upon the design of an automobile or imagine we could

be innovative in the area of fuel efficiency without a deep understanding of the systems involved. Yet, when it comes to human and social systems, we consistently try to chart a course for-



ward on the basis of conventional levels of understanding. We look at individual problems without understanding the dynamics of the broader system.

What would it take to develop an understanding of human and social systems that was rich enough to support wise diagnostics and design?

It requires significant study to understand the problem by immersing yourself into that particular field. It requires gathering resources—research and expertise to find the best information. It requires experimentation and testing of solutions. For “wise” innovation to happen it requires constant thinking about causes and consequences that go beyond narrow self interest and are human and life system referenced.

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“...when experts are wrong, the centerpiece of their professional identity is threatened. Therefore, dissonance theory would predict, the more self-confident and famous they are, the less likely they would admit mistakes.”

Page 30, Mistakes Were Made

“The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.”

Thomas Carlyle

Seeing “Different”

by Brenda Herchmer

I have an awesome job that has recently provided me with the opportunity to travel to a number of diverse communities across the province of Alberta.

It struck me recently that even though the communities are diverse, they are struggling with many of the same complex and ambiguous issues.

Not only are they being challenged to find ways to do more with less, they’re trying to do it while achieving results faster and maintaining high quality.

Their leaders are addressing rising health care costs, a growing divide between the “have’s” and the “have nots”, an increase in diseases related to inactivity, a pre-occupation with bottom line financial results that has overridden “public good outcomes”, devolution of responsibility from senior levels of government to local governments and the voluntary sector, and aging facilities and infrastructure.

And, while the challenges may be the same, the responses from the communities are not.

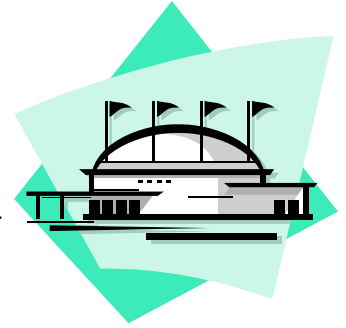
While some communities stay stuck, others have risen to the challenges with some wonderfully innovative responses.

To combat growing obesity, one tiny community is organizing their own version of the television show, “The Biggest Loser”.

Another town has incorporated a state-of-the-art indoor running track within the seating of a newly built arena. With a population of only 15,000, they’ve also managed to include skyboxes that were sold out to corporations before the arena opened. Within the same building, they’ve added a fitness centre, swimming pool, and co-located with a university in order to provide a kinesiology lab, fitness testing, physiotherapy and a host of other services in order to truly become a centre for well-being.

Another community struggled with what to do with a perfectly good arena in the wrong location. They knew that accessibility would be increased if a new one could

be grouped with all of the other recreation facilities at a different location. The clever solution was to renovate the existing arena to become the new city hall and library. Skylights were added and many of the exposed ducts and struts were painted in colourful hues. The reception area is bright and open with offices added around the perimeter. The resulting ambience is quite wonderful.



But why is it that some communities are successful in generating innovative solutions while others get stuck? According to the late American business guru, Peter F. Drucker, innovation is “change which creates a new dimension of performance”.

“I can’t understand why people are afraid of new ideas. I’m frightened of the old ones.”

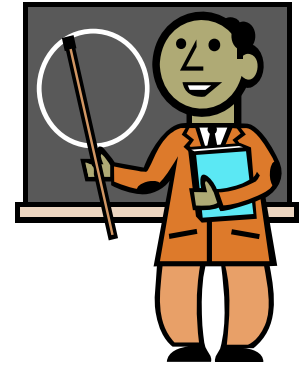
John Cage (1912-1992)

Instead of thinking about innovation as a specific event or product, these communities have understood, as Drucker preached, that innovation is more about an integrative process for solving complex problems. They’ve learned that the process of innovation is enhanced through social exchange and a collaborative, agile, and ongoing community development process that explores assets, challenges, and opportunities...ultimately getting them to the place “where need meets opportunity”.

Collaboration seems to be the DNA or critical element required for improving innovation and ultimately performance. When a number of partners and/or sectors are involved in generating the solution, innovative responses are a typical result.

Turns out, the old adage is true, “many heads are better than one” and collaboration and partnerships just might be the “secret sauce” of strong, healthy, and vibrant communities.

Expertise



How would you define an expert? For many people, “an expert is someone who knows all the answers”. In exploring this assumption, research has found that this definition placed severe restraints on new learning because the tendency was for people to worry about looking competent rather than acknowledging the need for help and searching for what they don’t know.

So, what is expertise?

According to a study by the National Research Council (USA), “it is not simply general abilities, such as memory or intelligence, nor the use of general strategies that differentiate experts from novices. Instead, experts have acquired extensive knowledge that affects what they notice and how they organize, represent and interpret information in their environment. This in turn affects their abilities to remember, reason and solve problems.”

Here are some of the key findings:

Patterns: Experts in a certain field tend to notice features and meaningful patterns of information that are not noticed by novices. The ability to see patterns depends on the amount of knowledge one has in a certain area. Why is this useful? We can only hold so much information in our short-term memory. This capacity involves the development of organized conceptual structures, or schemas (maps) that guide how problems are represented and understood and enhance our ability to pull relevant information out.

Depth of Understanding: Experts’ knowledge is not just a list of facts and formulas but instead, is organized around core concepts or “big ideas” that guide their thinking about their field of knowledge. Novices tend to respond to the surface characteristics of problems, perceiving problem solving in terms of memorizing, recalling and manipulating equations to get answers or find solutions. Experts will often map out ideas in a systematic way to help them interpret information by exploring laws or principles related to the issue.

Conditionalized Knowledge: “Experts’ knowledge cannot be reduced to sets of isolated facts or propositions but, instead, reflects contexts of applicability; that is, the knowledge is “conditionalized” on a set of circumstances. Experts have a vast amount of knowledge that is relevant to their domain or discipline but only a subset of that knowledge is relevant to any particular problem and experts are good at retrieving only the “relevant” information.

“Learning is not compulsory...neither is survival.”

W.Edwards Deming

Fluency: Experts’ are able to retrieve important knowledge with little attentional effort. This doesn’t mean they solve the problem faster – as experts attempt to understand problems rather than to jump immediately to solution strategies, they sometimes take more time than novices. Fluency is important because effortless processing places fewer demands on conscious attention (we can only attend to so much at a time) and gives people more capacity to attend to other aspects of the task (think about learning to drive a car – at first there is much to be attended to and you can’t hold a conversation AND drive the car).

Adaptive Expertise: Experts demonstrate a characteristic known as “metacognition”. This is the ability to monitor one’s current level of understanding as well as decide when it is not adequate and as the ability to recognize the limits of one’s knowledge and take steps to remedy the situation. Adaptive experts are able to approach new situations flexibly and to learn throughout their lifetimes. They not only use what they have learned, they are metacognitive and continually question their current levels of expertise and attempt to move beyond them.

Source: “How People Learn, Brain, Mind, Experience and School”, National Research Council, Washington DC, 2000.



Leadership West Yellowhead Community Leadership Program Facilitator

Leadership West Yellowhead is seeking a Facilitator for its Community Leadership Program. The program aims to develop leadership skills and community awareness in existing and emerging leaders in the West Yellowhead region. The facilitated component of this experiential learning journey consists of a 2-day opening retreat in April 2008, six learning days scheduled monthly between April and September 2008, and a 1.5-day closing retreat in October 2008. Participants also complete a “Community Action Project” as part of the program, and are matched with a mentor. Further information is available on our website: www.leadershipwestyellowhead.com.

The program will draw participants from six municipalities: Edson, Grande Cache, Hinton, Jasper, Woodlands County, and Yellowhead County. *Leadership West Yellowhead* is a non-profit initiative of Community Futures West Yellowhead. It is a Community Leadership Program based on the model and philosophy of the Canadian Community Leadership Network (www.cclnet.org).

Leadership West Yellowhead's Curriculum Committee will provide the facilitator with outlines for the retreats and learning days. The facilitator will be responsible for guiding the participants through interactive, participatory, adult education activities in order to achieve the desired outcomes for each day. Formats may include (but are not limited to) presentations, case studies, group discussions, role-playing, and field visits. Emphasis on hands-on, interactive activities is essential.

The Curriculum Committee will arrange guest speakers to help address some of the Community Topics, as well as guest facilitators who will present mini-workshops on some Learning Days.

The textbook for the program is Kouzes & Posner's The Leadership Challenge, 4th edition. Each learning day will include required readings and discussions from the text.

The retreats and learning days will take place in various locations throughout the West Yellowhead Region. It is anticipated that there will be two learning days scheduled in Hinton, two in Edson, one in Grande Cache, and one in Jasper.

If you are interested in more information and details of the RFP, please contact:

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Deadline for applications is February 29th, 2008.

This newsletter provides you information about leadership development in Alberta. Its purpose is threefold:

1. To provide you with an opportunity to share information, experiences and approaches to leadership development;
2. To make connections between the people and organizations who are engaged in leadership development.
3. To support continued research and learning for the kind of leadership our communities need in the future.

Books worth reading...

“Mistakes Were Made (but not by *me*)”

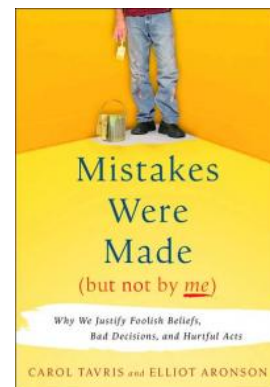
By Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson

“As fallible human beings, all of us share the impulse to justify ourselves and avoid taking responsibility for any actions that turn out to be harmful, immoral, or stupid. Most of us will never be in a position to make decisions affecting the lives and deaths of millions of people, but whether the consequences of our mistakes are trivial or tragic, on a small scale or a national canvas, most of us find it difficult, if not

impossible to say, “I was wrong; I made a terrible mistake.” The higher the stakes—emotional, financial, moral—the greater the difficulty.”

Authors Tavis and Aronson explore the science behind self justification, our need to feel good

about ourselves to the point of unconscious deception and selective memory. It’s an insightful and interesting look at the trouble we have thinking about our thinking. A book worth reading...



“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”

Leadership Volunteers—Upcoming Events



The **2008 Board Leadership: Ideas Into Action** event is scheduled for **Saturday, March 29, 2008** at the City Centre Campus of Grant MacEwan College. This day-long program of engaging and informative workshops is focused on board members of voluntary/non-profit organizations and will provide a variety of sessions addressing the needs of both beginner and experienced board members. **Details are being finalized in January and you will soon be able to access the information on the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations website at www.ecvo.ca.**

Recruit, Retain, Recognize and Risk Management—Essential and interactive training for volunteer integration ...Volunteer Alberta is hosting upcoming training opportunities on the 4 R’s of volunteer management... Recruit, Retain, Recognize and Risk management. Sessions across the province on the **Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement** and **Screening Volunteers In – Not Out** will put you and your organization at the forefront of a new approach to volunteer management. Funded through the Wild Rose Foundation and organized by Volunteer Alberta, don’t miss these incredible, low-cost opportunities. This is essential information for board members, senior staff, volunteers and volunteer managers. To encourage participation, out of town travel subsidies are available.

Register online at screeningandccvi.eventbrite.com for professional development opportunities on the CCVI and Screening, co-hosted by Volunteer Centres. Call Volunteer Alberta at 1-877-915-6336 or visit www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca, or call your local Volunteer Centre.

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Volunteer Alberta

Board Leadership Conference

Committee

*Supporting Community
Leadership Development*

From the Editor...

Do you have a story from your community or organization you would like to share? If so, please give me a call or email me—I would love to hear from you...

Duna Bayley—Editor

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www.municipalaffairs.gov.ab.ca

- click on the “Municipalities and Communities” tab on top
- click on the arrow to open “Services for Communities” link on the left
- Click and open “Leadership Development”

Learning Leadership From History – January 11, 1922

In the early 1900s, scientists recognized that there was a connection between the pancreas and diabetes. They didn't fully know how the pancreas worked, but through their research they understood that if an animal had its pancreas removed, it would get diabetes. Once biochemists began to learn about hormones, they surmised that the pancreas produced some unknown hormone related to diabetes.

Even before scientists could isolate the mysterious hormone, they gave it a name. The pancreas has certain blotches of strange cells with unknown purpose; they were named the "Islets of Langerhans." (A German physician named Langerhans had discovered them in 1869.) Since scientists believed the unknown hormone was produced there, they named it "insulin," from the Latin word for "island."

In 1921, Canadian scientists, Dr. Frederick Banting (photo right) and medical student Charles Best successfully extracted insulin from laboratory dogs. The insulin stopped the symptoms of diabetes in animals.



The first human subject, on January 11, 1922, was a 14-year-old named Leonard Thompson. He was admitted to Toronto General Hospital for treatment. Insulin treatment led to immediate improvements, and he gained strength and energy. While diabetes wasn't cured, it could now be treated, and millions of people have benefited from insulin in the last eighty years.

Banting and Best, for their adaptive persistence in finding a treatment, won the Nobel Prize in 1923.

Source: American Diabetes Association