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## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Future

### *The Connection Between Change and Creativity*

*“When you can’t change the direction of the wind, adjust your sails.”*

—H. Jackson Brown Jr.

**W**henever I’ve felt confident about my ability to plan the course of my life, a funny thing happens on the way to the future. It’s called *change*. You may have noticed the same thing.

The problem with change is we tend to build our future focused squarely on the past. Not just our personal past but on the entire history of humankind. We base our decisions on the things we have learned in the past, our past experiences, our past personal preferences—these all play key roles in shaping our future.

Likewise, our society forecasts the behavior of the economy based on past cycles. We decide when to plant and harvest based on past growing patterns of crops and consumer demand; we design educational curriculum to develop the skills and knowledge that have been valued and proven useful in the past.

Much of the time, this strategy works. But then the economy changes, making us rethink our plans for retirement; new inventions make jobs obsolete and bring untried opportunities; and quite distressing in my personal experience, the local pub no longer serves my favorite bacon butty.

Change not only upsets the carefully constructed apple carts, it also forces us to make decisions when we already had our hearts set on something else—and perhaps don’t feel adequately equipped to make new plans. Will

ordering the steak and kidney pie really satisfy my hunger, when I'm still missing my bacon butty?

For these reasons, it's not surprising that when we sense impending change in the air, many of us feel a distinct sense of unease.

Some of us, however, are better at embracing change than others. Perched on their rocky province on the east coast of Canada, Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans are a uniquely creative and interesting people, as anyone who has had the pleasure of visiting them will know. Their culture is innovative to its very core and exemplifies many of the themes explored in this book. Humorous, playful, politically astute, and masters of their own domain, their survival in a harsh climate is a testament to their individual and collective imagination.

It was in Newfoundland that I first met the late Dr. Robert (Bobby) Moore. Bobby held a broad variety of positions during his career, including as a teacher, a university lecturer, a radio broadcaster, and a theologian, all before being appointed as high commissioner to Canada for Guyana. When I was teaching in Newfoundland, we used to bring Bobby in quite often to talk to us about a variety of subjects and to provoke our thinking and our actions, things he was very good at.

## **TIMES OF INBETWEENITY: TIMES BETWEEN TIMES**

It was on one such occasion that Bobby discussed why creativity, in his opinion, was the best pathway forward for our society. Bobby explained that we are living in a world of *inbetweenity*—a time in between times, when one era is on its way out, and the next era has not yet fully emerged. That bubble in between the two eras is a time of inbetweenity.

Bobby believed that during times of inbetweenity, the status quo no longer works, but at the same time, no one is quite sure what's going to happen next. For many people, inbetweenity is therefore a period of insecurities and unknowns; a time when individuals, organizations, and societies jockey for advantage in the face of changes that have not yet fully revealed themselves.

For me, the concept of inbetweenity provides an excellent perspective from which to view the “ages” the human race has braved in the past. These eras and ages are often heralded by significant social upheaval, such as war, pandemic, political uprising, economic boom or bust, or by a game-changing innovation such as the steam engine, printing press, internal combustion engine, airplane, medical advances, or the Internet. As such, each era appears,

in retrospect at least, to have a fairly abrupt and identifiable beginning, and often a fairly distinct ending, brought about when the “Next Big Thing” came along.

In times past, society’s ages and stages proceeded along at a much more leisurely pace. As far as day-to-day living was concerned, a person who fell asleep during the year 917 and woke up in the year 1017 would hardly notice the difference.

On the other hand, someone taking a century-long nap from 1917 to 2017 might well think they’d been shipped off to another planet. In fact, I’ve read that some experts believe the shock of experiencing such a change would be so unnerving that a real Rip Van Winkle might actually die, and I believe it. Every morning when I wake up and see how much the price of gas has changed overnight, I almost die myself.

## TIMES OF INBETWEENITY HAVE EVOLVED TO TIMES OF COMPLEXITY

The upshot of this rapid rate of change is that eras are no longer politely waiting for a former age to leave the stage before emerging from the wings. Instead, we are seeing hundreds of ages and eras take the stage simultaneously across all spheres of society: educational, political, spiritual, economic, social, technological, medical, scientific, environmental, and many others. As a result, we have moved beyond the times when there could be a breath of inbetweenity between each new age as they moved along in a linear fashion. Instead, I believe we are now living in what could best be described as a *state of complexity*: a time when there are no longer beginnings or endings but rather a continuous confluence of changes.

This state of complexity impacts our world in three unprecedented ways.

1. **Changes push and pull us in all directions at once.** In times past, the world’s ages were perceived as evolutionary stages of progress; generally, each stage built upon the lessons and developments of the previous one to sedately advance quality of life, knowledge, and reason. In states of complexity, however, we are evolving, devolving, revolving, and moving sideways, all at the same time. In fact, advances that are perceived to push one sphere of society forward, such as resource extraction, may be perceived to have a direct and negative impact on another, such as the environment.

**2. There is less consensus on what “progress” looks like or in which direction we should be trying to pull together.** With social media, we have all become news reporters as well as news consumers. Social media is also giving today’s activists and lobbyists the ability to instantly communicate, recruit, and organize for their causes, facing off multiple stakeholder groups with opposing viewpoints to create a cacophony of confluence. Yet despite having easier, faster, and more prevalent means to communicate with each other today, we often react by trying to drown others out or prevent them from speaking. At the same time, the Internet enables myths, urban legends, false statistics, and even “fake” news stories to take on lives of their own.

**3. This complexity makes future trends more difficult—if not impossible—to predict.** Within the mathematical concept of chaos theory, complex systems are highly sensitive to changes in conditions, so even small alterations can result in disproportionate consequences—hypothetically, one small flap of a butterfly’s wing can wreak catastrophic weather changes on the other side of the world. The puzzle of our global economic recovery demonstrates this. Whereas some top economists have been drawing on historic patterns to forecast an end to the global recession since 2010, today’s global economy continues to baffle us, moving two steps forward, one step back, and three steps sideways—until we all might wonder if it will do the hokey-pokey next!

With this third impact, it’s important to keep in mind that whereas modest changes to conditions in a complex system can lead to disproportionate results, those results aren’t always negative. Take a look at the recent evolution of social media in which a single plea for help can be shared millions of times within a single day, helping to catch criminals and kidnappers; track down lost children, pets, friends, and family members; return lost teddy bears; and find funding not just for charitable causes but innovations, businesses, and personal dreams. In our new age of complexity, even a single person, such as yourself, making a single positive change can have a domino effect more quickly than ever before.

## **WHAT DOES THIS STATE OF COMPLEXITY HAVE TO DO WITH CREATIVITY?**

Let’s go back to Bobby Moore for a moment. In times of inbetweenity, when one age is on its way out and another is on its way in, people are often forced to get creative if they are going to survive. When an ice age is on the horizon,

figuring out new ways to build sturdier shelters, stay warm, and secure new food sources is imperative; when a new technology makes your job obsolete, you must come up with ways to evolve your abilities and learn new skills. This is why times of change often go hand in hand with innovation.

For Bobby, there were three main ways in which people dealt with times of inbetweenity, or that space of time between major societal changes.

In the first group are those who attempt to stay rooted in the past, holding on to the status quo for dear life. They keep doing the same things, communicating the same information, engaging people in the same way, offering the same programs, and seeking funding from the same sources, as they have always done. For this group, change becomes a source of great anxiety, because no matter how hard they try to stop it, it's like trying to solve tomorrow's problems with yesterday's rules, or abolishing the future in the name of the past. It just doesn't work.

The second group, a rather analytical bunch, takes a line from the past and attempts to follow it into the future. They declare they want to accept change, but they try to deal with the uncertainty by projecting current or past trends within known, narrowly defined parameters. They will take what they already have and already know, perhaps announce a new transformational regime across their school board or organization, and hope it will work to address the evolving landscape of the sector. It's like writing new chapters onto a text that has already been written. That might work in a world where everything is expected to stay the same or change in slow and orderly incremental steps. But when major changes are afoot, what's often needed to survive and flourish is not adding new chapters onto an old text but writing a whole new book.

A third group, by contrast, embraces the developing uncertainties, employing a faculty of vision. These individuals understand that the way to lead others along a path of vision is to foster environments that harness imagination and creativity in pursuit of innovation. They use their imagination and their will not to control the future, nor to attempt to predict the future, but to *invent* it. They take not one line but many lines into the future, some old and some new, and weave them into patterns to form a new future—something that has never been seen before. These practical visionaries have the ability to construct in their imagination worlds that are not yet but can be.

I believe that in states of complexity, such as the one we are now experiencing, different groups of people react much the same as Bobby proposed in his times of inbetweenity, with one important difference: *the urge to control*.

The confluence of so many changes and variables makes it hard for people to even know where to begin sorting it all out, so they try to control the complexity, nail it down, put it into a plan, and contrive ways to monitor it, manage it, measure it, and mitigate it.

There are drawbacks to this approach. First, whereas no one is going to argue that research or planning are bad things, trying to pin down precisely what is happening during states of complexity can soon suck financial and human resources down into an infinite black hole. Things are changing so quickly and in so many different directions that by the time research or a study is complete, some of the variables may have changed considerably. Ironically, in a time when we can access the world's knowledge in an instant on the Internet, for every research paper that says one thing, you can find another that says the opposite. Attempting to endlessly find the One Right Answer or the One Perfect Solution may therefore be futile; it may be more advantageous to research a variety of flexible and nimble solutions, backup resources, and contingency plans.

In our classrooms, we need to teach students to answer the questions, but we also need to teach them to question the answers.

Another challenge with this approach is that we tend to become more rigid and inflexible as we try to control and subdue the complexity. Knowing there are numerous factors beyond our control, we may attempt to micro-manage those things that are within our grasp. Again, no one is going to argue that trying to control and mitigate those risks we are capable of predicting is a bad thing to do. But as with trying to master and forecast what's happening in a world of complexity, trying to focus too much on controlling things, including micromanaging the people and processes around you, can work against you and usually strangles innovation and ideas.

It's easy to see how this need to control becomes an attractive option in our educational and work environments. It often starts out when a company is faced with an actual or predicted weaker bottom line. To deal with this, top executives create mission and vision statements that are cascaded down the ranks to define, corral, and control all activities. Each team leader and employee is tasked with annual objectives and daily tasks to fulfill the mission and vision, and their progress will be rewarded or penalized accordingly. Organizational charts, process maps, and standardization flow charts are drawn up, letting people know which little box they fit into, what tasks they need to complete each day, and where their tasks fit within the big-picture process. If anyone has a question, one need only point to the established org chart, process chart, or decision-making chart to find the answer. The concept of stopping wastes—of time, money, and resources—becomes paramount.

It all sounds efficient and good in theory, and it certainly has its benefits. But in states of complexity, the urge to micro-control everything makes it easy for organizations to mistake lean processing, scheduling, measuring, and managing as the primary goal of their business or organization—when it should be how to make the world a better place. If they can put creativity and

innovation to work to create a product or a service that can do that, monetary profits or other desired rewards and benefits should soon follow.

This concept of “lean processing” in business, nonprofits, and government is not too far removed from common approaches to educational processes. As budgets shrink and many postsecondary facilities find themselves competing on global and digital scales for a shrinking student population, there’s an increasing incentive to standardize, scale efficiencies, do more with less, and monitor success through purely objective measures. This puts pressure on educational policymakers and teachers to “lean process” education, with one standard curriculum, approved processes to deliver the material, standardized tests to measure progress, and the like. Virtually every teacher I’ve spoken to would love to spend more time personalizing learning to best suit each individual student, but time constraints make this difficult.

## TAKEN TOO FAR, LEAN PROCESSING IS LEAN ON INNOVATION

Schools, companies, organizations, and governments can focus so intently on this “lean processing” that they lose sight of the big picture. The process and the org chart become so rigidly entrenched that no one is allowed to step outside the lines. Team leaders are encouraged to ensure the same process is performed, with the same result, every time. This may work well for a time or in some areas, such as manufacturing, leading company executives to believe that rigid control is working for them. In fact, an initial success often reinforces the rationale to repeat the exact same process in an attempt to replicate the success and discourages innovation or new ways of doing things.

But as times change (and complexity reigns supreme), the end result of the process eventually becomes obsolete—and with no planned innovation in the company, the bottom line once again starts to suffer. Which, ironically, often encourages the top brass to step up the lean processing all the more!

Edward Hess (2015), professor of business administration at the Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, and author of 11 books, wrote about the need to balance lean processing with the need to innovate in his article, “Is Your Six Sigma Stifling Innovation?” You can see how closely related innovation is to learning:

Very soon, the tasks that Lean and Six Sigma have helped operationalize will be handled primarily by robots and smart machines. And that’s a good thing. Nothing beats a robot in terms of efficiency and perfection. But here’s the *real* question: How good is

your company at doing all the things robots *can't* do well—such as innovate? . . . the *only* real competitive advantage these days is the ability to learn and innovate. That means your organization must be okay with risk—and the screw-ups, missteps, and waste that inevitably accompany it. The problem, of course, is that an organization steeped in the lore of Lean and Six Sigma naturally views them as sins to stamp out.

## CREATIVITY HAS ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT, BUT IT'S EVEN MORE SO NOW

I believe creativity is increasingly important today because we are currently in a state of complexity. As discussed, the world has changed more in the last century than in the two millennia that went before it. We will never go back to times of inbetweenity, when ages and stages proceeded along in a polite, orderly fashion. States of complexity are here to stay.

For many people, not knowing what's going to happen next can be unsettling. In the past, when humans found themselves in a tough spot, it was often our ability to see correlations, make connections, and predict events that helped pull us through.

It's easy to see why we evolved this way. Certainly humans had a better chance of survival if they could predict when the herds would migrate and the blueberries would ripen, when the snow would arrive, and what time the local saber-toothed tiger liked to eat lunch. Today's Day-Timers and planners have stepped out of that primordial soup of correlation and cause and effect so we can plan and predict every aspect of our lives down into 15-minute time slots. Longer term, albeit less predictably, we forecast what the weather will be like for our Saturday garden party and surmise what skills students need to learn today to be productive, happy, and healthy members of society 20 years from now.

At the same time, despite our natural yearning for predictability, creativity is not a new concept. Greek, Roman, Persian, Indian, and Chinese civilizations had modern-type plumbing dating back nearly 5,000 years ago, and around the same time, the Finns invented ice skates from using sharpened animal bones. The Indus Valley Civilization was creating standardized measuring devices for length, weight, and time and practicing dentistry. There are countless examples of innovation that were created even before the first wheel was invented, let alone the other three—and today's scientists are still trying to figure out how some civilizations managed their feats of knowledge, skill, and engineering.

There is little doubt that a lot of humankind's innovative leaps came during times of inbetweenity and within our current state of complexity.



We could not have survived by using our instinct for predictability alone. But what I find most interesting is that innovation isn't always borne from the mother of necessity. Sometimes, innovation comes not from attempting to solve a problem or escape from impending doom but from aspiring to imagine “what could be”—an instinct to push forward the greater well-being of humankind.

## CHANGING OUR FUTURES WITH A MIND-SET SHIFT

Carol Dweck, a researcher from Stanford University, is best known for her research into human motivation. In her theory she calls “mindset,” the beliefs we develop about our own ability to learn can have a formative and powerful influence over who we become. She developed this theory while working with children, when she noticed two different mind-sets among them. Those with *fixed* mind-sets believed their abilities were predetermined, that they had a set intelligence and character with limited potential for change. On the other hand, those with *growth* mind-sets placed no such limitation on themselves. They felt their inborn assets were only a starting point—a belief that through effort, play, learning, and embracing possibility, they could change and grow continually.

I once heard another speaker say there are two types of people in the world: those who say there are two types of people in the world and those who don't. I should caution you that I fall into the latter category. Having only two types of people could get rather dull.

But what I find fascinating about Dweck's work is that the fixed mind-set group actually has the *same* potential for growth as the growth mind-set group; as far as potential goes, the two groups are, in fact, one and the same. Dweck (2006) sums this up succinctly when she says, “Mindsets are just beliefs. They're powerful beliefs, but they're just something in your mind, and you can change your mind” (p. 16).

The understanding and reality of Dweck's fixed and growth mind-sets has a profound impact on how individuals think and behave. I believe it also has huge implications for group and organizational learning.

Dweck is not the only one with this belief. Ellen Langer (1997), in her theory of “mindfulness,” says we are taught to search for certainty. But once we are certain of something, we actually become *mindless*, no longer examining or analyzing the concept we think we know. Yet ironically, the thing we thought certain is no longer true, because everything is constantly changing. *Mindfulness* is the understanding that things look one way from one perspective but completely different from another. Learning happens when you notice new things. I believe this process of mindfulness is common to great

thinkers across disciplines. They constantly vary the way in which they attend to things, allowing them to escape the bounds of convention, to free their imaginations to create new possibilities. This is what catalyzes human development.

## Stories From the Field

### The Fallacy of the Right Answer

Another interesting facet of how we humans approach our changing landscape is our urge to find an answer, usually to a problem. This is especially true in education. The then-director and CEO of the Canada Council of the Arts, Robert Sirman, who spoke to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Leadership Conference in 2009, describes this as “the fallacy of the right answer.” Here’s a paraphrased version of the story he told us that day, about growing up as a baby boomer in Toronto, Ontario’s, public education system:

*The ease with which I advanced through this system resulted in my ending up with the misguided notion that getting ahead was based on being smart. For 18 years, I had been part of a system in which the rules remained relatively stable: Someone in authority would ask me a question, and if I gave the right answer, I could move forward. After many years of positive reinforcement, I believed that having the right answers was what was necessary to succeed in life. . . .*

*Today I’d like to talk a bit about the fallacy of this logic. . . . The notion of the right answer I learned as a student is relatively simplistic, (like) someone answering a multiple-choice question. In our professional lives, especially in jobs that involve working with other people, it is rare to encounter challenges that are so one-dimensional in nature. Simplistic is the last word I would use to describe leading creative organizations.*

*Leading creative organizations means making room for other people’s input. It means having as a starting point a willingness to accept many different points of view and a recognition that everyone in the organization, no matter where they find themselves in the institutional hierarchy, has something of value to offer.*

*If what you are trying to achieve in leading creative organizations is positive outcomes, such outcomes have the highest probability of success when you can engage the creative contributions of as many people in your organization as possible. Compliance in creative organizations does not come from telling other people what to do, no matter how smart you might think you are, or how good your proposal, but by engaging them in determining a shared course of action.*

## **WHAT PEOPLE CAN LEARN FROM PALM TREES**

When organizations refuse to bend during a state of complexity, they ultimately tend to break. Nature has evolved that way. Picture how a palm tree bends and sways in the face of a hurricane, when winds are pulling it in all directions, and you'll understand why flexibility is essential during a state of complexity. Unfortunately, organizations too often take the opposite approach. The more chaotic and confusing the world becomes, the harder they hold on to "the way things have always been done" and resist implementing the conditions that would help creativity, innovation, and success to flourish. At the same time, we have countless cases of people and groups who took a risk, became less rigid, and thrived in states of complexity.

## **TAKE A GANDER AT CREATIVITY FLOURISHING IN A STATE OF COMPLEXITY**

For one of my favorite examples that really illustrates the conditions for creativity we'll explore later on, let's go back to my beloved Newfoundland and Labrador.

What happened during 9/11 in Gander, Newfoundland, is a story that has been told many times before, but I will tell it again because not only does the feat almost defy belief, but every time it is told, new details come to light from the 16,000+ souls who were unexpectedly thrown together that day. For that reason alone, it is a story that will never get old. It beautifully shows how a community embraced overwhelming change and uncertainty during an immense state of complexity and utter chaos and fostered innovation, imagination, and a culture of belonging to create ripples of inspiration that are still felt around the world to this day.

It becomes even more inspirational if you compare the feat achieved by the townsfolk of Gander with how an organization today, bound tightly by its self-inflicted processes and hierarchies, might approach such a situation.

Imagine, if you will, the reaction of any organization, either public or private-sector, being tasked with an operation that would require it to land 42 flights from around the world and host, for about a week, 6,600 people of many different languages and cultures in a small Newfoundland town of 10,000 with only 550 hotel rooms.

Even as a planned event, most organizations today would flat-out refuse. Those willing to take it on would say they required at least two or three years to build new hotels and restaurants and millions in financial backing. They would need consultants, meetings, GANNT charts, processes, and a committee to organize more committees. To add some context, the facilities to house 2,600 athletes during the 2010 Winter Olympics in Whistler, B.C., took almost four years to build and cost, depending on which source you look at, from \$500 million to \$1 billion.

But on September 11, 2001, the people of Gander had no such opportunity to plan or budget for this unprecedented event that was about to happen. (Consider, too, that this took place before the age of widespread social media communications and its ability to rally and coordinate efforts.) On that morning, this small-town airport on the northeastern tip of North America was designated as the destination for more than three dozen diverted flights to land due to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

Within this extreme state of complexity and chaos, where no one knew what was going to happen next (or even what was happening right now), the people and business communities of the Gander region banded together and took action. Rather than simply react to the complex events, or try to hold on to the status quo, they worked together to reinvent the future.

Gander became the little town that could. Every individual was needed to take part, for it was recognized that *every single individual had leadership skills and talents to offer*. Even the high school students were required to spend all class time volunteering to help with the guests. Guided by radio announcements, residents and businesses quickly gathered up the essentials for their 6,600 unexpected guests: blankets, toothbrushes and toothpaste, soap and shampoo, deodorant, and even socks and underwear.

Next, *they took a strength-based approach*. Instead of looking at the circumstances as a series of problems to be solved, the people involved took a strength-based approach and looked at “what could be.” With compassion and grace, they sought not only to meet the physical needs of the stranded passengers but also to bring about emotional comfort, inspiration, and even joy. In doing so, they created a future that, quite unpredictably, brought positivity and profound meaning out of a very tragic situation.

Then, in an extraordinary gesture of generosity, the Gander townsfolk built on this strength-based approach to *create a culture of belonging*. They opened their homes, schools, and churches to the weary and worried passengers, offering hot showers, guest rooms, home-cooked meals, and someone to talk to. They sourced kosher food for an Orthodox Jewish family and found interpreters for those who could not speak English. They even took people on excursions and sightseeing trips, hikes through the forest, and boat cruises around the harbor. The local phone company, Newtel Communications, enabled passengers to call their loved ones and let them know they were safe. Later, in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, an American passenger described the people of Gander as endlessly cheerful, giving, and kind, dropping everything to make the stranded passengers “feel less isolated and abandoned during those five days of uncertainty.”

From this environment, *the conditions were in place for the extraordinary to happen*. Many people expressed that when thinking back on this time, they would never forget the goodness and kindness showered on them from the people of Gander. Passengers cried as they told these stories. The passengers of one flight, Delta 15, even set up a scholarship fund. To date, the fund has paid out more than \$1.5 million and assisted more than 135 students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Given this example, it's easy to see how faculties of vision and creation are needed in states of complexity. But when we consider how different people approach times of inbetweenity or complexity, when one group clings to the past and a second group is only comfortable talking about change instead of taking action, how can we successfully unleash individual and collective imaginative and creative potential so we can all move into the future together?

## THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

As we steer our courses of action through this modern-day state of complexity, there is cause for great optimism. Several bodies of research are revealing a very interesting story about the human condition. We are continuing to learn more about who we are and how each of us can help shape the next stages of our development. We are learning more about what motivates us. We have developed a richer understanding of the nature of intelligence itself. We have greater insights into how we come to learn what we learn. We are starting to understand more about the intricate connections between emotion and cognition in the learning process. And thanks to amazing research made possible by technologies such as MRI, we are gaining deeper insights into the workings of the human brain. This work is

bringing into focus a story of human capacity, of human learning, and, ultimately, of human potential.

Simultaneous to this research are visionary people embracing the uncertainties with their imagination and will who have started to draw connections, understandings, and potential patterns that will help us on our individual and collaborative journeys to shape desirable futures.

Sir Ken Robinson (2011), Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Warwick, and renowned creativity expert, is challenging us to transform learning. He says our educational systems were originally created to meet the requirements of the industrial economy. Like several of his peers, he believes we must rethink the current educational structure to make education relevant in today's world.

Another best-selling author and speaker, Daniel Pink (2009), is challenging us to draw on the new understandings of how we learn and how we are motivated and to reshape our organizations in a way that engages and motivates the people within them.

There's also Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (1997), whose work in the field of optimal experience and optimal learning has provided practical insights regarding how to foster environments in which people become attuned to their own creative learning potential.

Then there's Ellen Langer (1997), whose theories about mindfulness and the power of mindful learning show us that especially in times of complexity, the best thing we can do is believe there is more than one answer or correct way of looking at things. This approach of looking at different perspectives injects novelty, surprise, and esthetic into the learning environment.

Organizations are dedicating themselves to this cause. The Imaginative Literacy Program, *founded by Kieran Egan*, has created a website packed with theories, principles, and practical education techniques. The program believes that engaging students' imaginations in learning, and teachers' imaginations in teaching, is crucial to making knowledge in the curriculum vivid and meaningful. Their approach to teaching literacy draws on a sense of story, feelings and images, metaphors and jokes, the sense of wonder, heroes and the exotic, hopes, fears, and passions, and more to engage the imaginations of both teachers and students.

## **MY FATHER SHOWED ME HOW TO STAND IN THE WIND**

We also have countless other examples of everyday people who took a risk and thrived in times of complexity. You may have heard the story of Zita

Cobb who, after retiring from her position as a top executive at JDS Uniphase, moved home to Fogo Island off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador to help to reignite the economic health of her birthplace. She certainly exemplifies someone who embraces change and views the future as something to be invented. What you may not have heard is the story of her father, Lambert Cobb, from whom Zita appears to have inherited resiliency and foresight.

I was fortunate enough to hear Zita speak during one of our Lead the Way events for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Zita's parents raised seven children in a home without electricity or running water. Her father's family had fished in the region for generations before him.

Lambert Cobb could not read or write and yet, according to Zita, he was a pioneer in education. She explained how until the 1960s, Fogo Island was quite isolated from the rest of the world. Even the island's 10 communities had very little contact with each other. And within each community, schools were under the control of the church, and students were therefore even further divided into Protestant, Catholic, United, and Anglican schools. Multiply that by 10 communities, said Zita, and you have a lot of little schools and not that much education.

So when the inshore fishery came on the verge of economic collapse, Lambert realized that whereas people on the island had lived for 400 years in their own little world, where it didn't really matter much if one couldn't read or write, change was coming and they would have to learn to live in the big world.

Lambert then became an agitator to put all the students, regardless of religion, together in one high school. As a result, Zita's brother Steve was the first Catholic kid to go to a Protestant school—and that was instrumental in the move toward establishing an integrated high school on Fogo Island.

Although Zita Cobb has in many ways become a hero herself, as we discuss later in this book, in her eyes her father was her hero; he was the one who showed her how to “stand in the wind.”

## HOW DO YOU BEGIN TO MAKE THE EXTRAORDINARY HAPPEN?

It's clear that we as a society have much to gain from innovation, and this time of immense change and complexity sets the perfect stage for a new creative age.

In these first two chapters, I've tried to explain why creativity is so critical right now in this state of complexity. As you continue to read, you can start thinking about how you can map your way into the future and make sense of everything that's going on around you. It's really important to first determine *where you are right now*. You need to gauge how people in your

school—or your organization, family, or community—are feeling about and responding to the complexity in their lives. And despite all the great work that’s been done by the experts, you will need to do your own work here, because no two individuals, groups, or organizations are alike. That means you’ll have to ask some really profound questions and create a culture of trust so people aren’t afraid to give you some honest answers.

Remember, too, that you have an opportunity to be a leader here, because there is a close connection among creativity, learning, and leadership. And by leadership, I don’t just mean those who are in official leadership positions. *The Wonder Wall* is based on the understanding that everyone can and does exhibit amazing leadership roles in his or her jobs and everyday lives, and it is this type of informal leadership that really defines and fosters the heart, soul, and culture of an organization and can contribute to its progress.

So as you begin, the question you want to ask is *How do you make the extraordinary happen?* How can you help to ignite and harness the creative capacities within people? And there are questions you will want to ask others: What does leadership mean to you? What are the behaviors and characteristics of leadership? What is the ideal definition of leadership? And then ask the most important question: How are you being supported in your leadership capacities? When you get the answers, you’ll need to deal with these discussions openly and honestly and start the journey to grow your organization from there.

## Stories From the Field

### Everybody Is a Teacher

Principal Connie Daymond has seen firsthand the rewards of fostering leadership and creativity at all levels. “My philosophy is everybody is a teacher in the school. Whether you are a chief custodian, an office administrator, a volunteer, a business partner—everybody is a teacher,” she told me. “Anyone can come forward with an idea we can work on to make our school a better place.”

One inspiring example at her school is the Green Team, which was founded and has flourished under the leadership of chief custodian Josh Rebertz. I snapped this picture of Josh with one of his young protégés one day, and he explained to me what was happening in the photo and how the Green Team works.

“This was a little kindergarten boy who was having difficulties at the beginning of his school life, with various types of behavior problems.



“However, his teacher noticed he really liked to play with keys. Well, I’ve got hundreds of keys, many of which are no longer in use. So I made him a set of old keys and gave it to his teacher. She kept the keys in her desk and when he had a good day, he got to play with the keys.”

Eventually, Josh and the teacher wondered if getting the student to do a bit of work with Josh would further help him.

“To start, I would have him deliver a paper with me. We would go get a paper from the main office and take it to the photocopy room, and at that point I gave him an actual set of keys, and he would open the doors for me that we had to pass through.

“He was very proud of those keys; he wore them around his neck and showed them to everybody. So we started involving him in some little jobs occasionally. We started with sweeping. I took a broom and cut it down to his size, which you can see in the picture. He loved it so much that I did the same thing with a mop. It was great to see him enjoy the cleaning as much as he did. So whenever he had a good week, at 2 o’clock on Friday afternoon, I would go and pick him up, we would go and get the set of keys, and he’d put them around his neck and we’d sweep the halls.”

The student began to flourish under Josh’s leadership. “He built an amazing amount of confidence. Every time another student saw him in the hallway they would say, ‘Oh, what are you doing with Mr. Josh?’ And he would say with this big grin, ‘Oh, I’m helping him work and clean.’ And he would show off his keys.”

Today, the “Green Team” concept has expanded throughout the school, working with kids that teachers suggest might need a little guidance or are in need of an outlet.



Photo courtesy of Josh Rebertz and Katherine Pelletier

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“We got a great response from the teachers and formed a group of 15 kids to collect recycling. Now we’ve expanded to 25 kids, working in groups of five, five days a week,” says Josh. “The main point is to get the kids a little more involved, to build their teamwork skills and leadership skills. The students really feel great about being part of the team. Last year we even got T-shirts made, and it’s a real highlight to see the kids’ faces light up when they put on their Green Team shirts.”

“Once Josh started to work with the kids, you could see the change almost instantly in some of their behaviors,” Connie says. “Learning is also a key benefit. We have kids who would rather work with Josh than do math, so part of the process is to get them to understand that subjects like language and math and social studies are important to Josh’s work. Josh really reinforces the connections between what he does in the school to what other people do and the work that they do in their classes.”

Connie adds that Josh’s leadership is invaluable to the teaching process. “When there was a problem in the classroom, sometimes Josh would be called upon because of the relationship he had built with the student. With Josh, we’re building a culture of school teaching, not classroom teaching.”

Josh says, “It puts a face to the people that maintain the building. It helps the kids have a little more respect for the space they’re in, more respect for each other, and more respect for themselves that they build through their leadership and teamwork roles. If they can take that away from it, that makes it all worthwhile.”

### Try This!

**How do you get an accurate baseline of where leadership stands in your organization?**

First, don’t be afraid to ask the tough questions. Second, ask everyone in the organization for their views and solutions. Solutions and leadership must come from every part of the organization—and from outside of it. Ask *How do you create the conditions to foster an engaged and creative organization?* Then listen to what they have to say. Finally, involve everyone in coming up with solutions and doing something about it.