

# A Challenge to the Central Dogma of Business

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What is this love/hate relationship I maintain about the world of business? The way people engage one another for good or for bad intrigues me ...its creative responses to many of our world's issues stimulates me ...the often brutal indifference to individual needs and interests horrifies me ...the lofty aspirations of select individuals within a sea of greedy sharks inspires me ...its growing, world-wide institutional dominance entrances and terrifies me ...and much of its dogma and catechism revolts me. Yet I am unable to leave it alone. I move through my life unwilling to accept much of its dogma and yet participating as a business owner, engaging with clients to help make the workplace work better for people, and as an opinionated, creative participant/observer who can't stop offering up new ways for traditional conversations to be considered.

Like this article which is an invitation for you to consider that much of what you have been indoctrinated to hold as business "truth" is nothing more than dogma: beliefs about the nature of reality that are presented as fact, truth, the way it is.

Let's start with a biggie: the belief that there are such things as 'organizations'. You know, that place you head off to each day, whether it is a retail organization (store, call centre), a medical organization (hospital, doctor's office, pharmaceutical company, health clinic, etc.), bank, telephone company, police or fire department, municipal, provincial or federal government department, crown corporation, high tech company, service group (call centre, help desk, service department, complaints department, etc.), religious group or order, mining or other resource based industry. Yes, each one of them may very well be a legal entity that exists on paper, independent of any of the individuals involved.

But think about it again, that legal twist aside: what is an organization except you and me? And if we both go home, how much is going to be accomplished?

So why is it that we maintain a death grip on this collective illusion (delusion?) that there is this thing called "the organization"? To what end do we continue to invest so much of our energy and intelligence to this elusive 'thing': creating it, staffing it, changing it, reorganizing it, downsizing it, managing it, and leading it? Is it, perhaps, because each of us knows in our heart of hearts that if we maintain the illusion that there is 'an organization', then we can't personally be held accountable for what happens or doesn't happen?

I remember the tremendous wave of anxiety that moved through my body as I was studying Open Space Technology with Harrison Owen and we began to consider that the only time anything happens at work is when an individual has the combination of passion and willingness to take responsibility to make something happen. I thought of all the times in my vast work experience when someone with power and authority wanted something to happen and it was assigned to a person (notice how work always gets assigned to an individual, never to a team or

a department) who had neither passion for the assignment nor a willingness to take personal responsibility for it. Those projects simply wilted on the vine, producing virtually no results other than a lot of activity and grumpiness.

I also began to recall all the times when someone, regardless of where they were located in the hierarchy, decided to make something happen. How much got accomplished in remarkably short timeframes, often with embarrassingly small budgets and headcounts.

It was my first introduction to the possibility that this thing called 'organization' might not, in fact, exist! A scary thought indeed.

I remember the challenge of obtaining a master's degree in a discipline called Human Systems Intervention when I had come to believe the traditional definition of system did not exist. How do you intervene in a system that doesn't exist? I discovered that it was as simple as focusing on individuals and assuming that they are up to it, that's how!

It took a while for me to become fully comfortable working with the presupposition that all organizations are created and sustained by people who count and are able to shape their world. And I am aware of the incredible groundedness and clarity I now bring to my awareness of an alternate conversation about "organization". For me, there are only people. Individuals doing the best they can to move through their lives providing value in return for financial, social, emotional and spiritual returns. As I have focused my work on helping individual people to notice that they are what makes the difference in their workplace, magic begins to happen.

People begin to be willing to recognize the degree of choice they have available to them. Individuals begin to notice all the places where they assume that "the great they" is working against them when, in fact, it is their own rules holding them back. Individuals begin to claim back all the times they give their power away by assuming that they don't make a difference. People begin to notice that no one, including themselves, gets out of bed in the morning wondering how they can screw up at work today!

Whether they are at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy or at its pinnacle every person in your workplace carries their own story about what's available to them and what is forbidden to them by the "system". We often forget that even the CEO has masters and that the degree of freedom of expression perceived by the CEO is what shapes and frames his or her capacity not only to produce results but to feel alive and vibrant in the process.

So my question to you is this: if you were to act for just today as if there was no 'organization', as if it was just you and whoever else you are interacting with at any moment in time, as if both of you went home nothing would get done ...what might become possible? What conversations would you be up for that you currently keep to yourself? Who would you seek out that you currently avoid because you hold a belief that it is unacceptable to the organization? What would you start that you have held as unacceptable within your existing framework? What would stop doing because you're only doing it because you think 'the system' requires it of you?

My invitation is that you allow yourself to notice the inner conversations you have about your engagement with the outside world. Allow yourself to begin to notice all the times you silence yourself because you presume a rule exists or a negative response will ensue ...all the times you respond out of your 'role' rather than what is authentic for you in the moment ...all the times you make yourself smaller than you know you really are so that you won't detract from someone else ...all the times you need to make someone else smaller than they really are so that you can feel that you are seen ...all the times that you presume that there is an organization or a system when there really is just you and one other person seeking to connect and communicate so that your respective needs are met and that you create more.

*About Gwen McCauley:* Coach, educator, writer and veteran of the 'employee to entrepreneur' transformation process. With wit, wisdom and worldly experience, Gwen invites her clients on a journey of self-discovery, gaining clarity of purpose and increasing self-awareness and resourcefulness. Gwen brings a strong background as a corporate executive with extensive management experience to her work. She founded Odysseys Unlimited Inc. (OUI) in 1997 and is a co-founder of the WEL-Systems® Institute. Gwen has an MA in Human Systems Intervention from Concordia University and a successful track record as a coach, program leader and businesswoman. In addition to being a WEL-Systems Educator™, CODE Model™ Coach and Quantum TLC™ Facilitator, Gwen has studied Open Space Technology, Myers Briggs, Appreciative Inquiry, Generative Leadership and Total Quality Management. Gwen published her first book *"The Alchemy of Energy: Exploring The CODE Model"* in 2004 and co-authored *"Sekhmet Rising: the restlessness of women's genius"* with 17 other women in 2006. She is currently working on her third book.

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