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MANAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT:  
FROM DATA TO WISDOM  
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The following is a discussion of four fundamental stages that, when experienced by people, lead to empowerment. Also addressed is how the stages differ in the vertical and horizontal management systems. The four stages are Data, Information, Knowledge and Wisdom.

The vertical management system was created as a result of the industrial revolution to meet requirements for assembly line efficiency. The horizontal management system has always been a hidden or invisible part of the hierarchical system, depending on how open and participatory or closed and constrained that system was for employees.

Since the oil embargo of 1973 which essentially ended the industrial age, horizontal management systems have been coming into their own on a world wide basis. For various reasons, the latter has been set in motion by people who want to take direct control of their environment.

Organizations which are successfully entering the new age have recognized this phenomenon. Power no longer belongs only to the vertical system. There is a different kind of power when the vertical and horizontal systems are brought together into an open management system. The closer the two fit together, the more harmony there is among cultural, technical, and political processes, thus creating cost efficiency, increased self-determination and motivation among the people. Discussion of the four stages—data, information, knowledge and wisdom—follows.

- A. DATA: Defined as numbers, facts, or statements that has holistic or cultural meaning only to the person who has or generates the data.

Vertical (hierarchy or command)

1. Has no grounding, usually handed on by generator as though it had meaning to recipients. When data becomes detached from the action of the human person, it

Horizontal (networks or choice)

1. Exists within living bodies, or generated by people who will carry into action; has soul and life; quite often oral in nature and has the cultural values embodied in the numbers, facts or statements.

has the potential of fragmenting, alienating or oppressing because only the generator knows its social/cultural origins. Usually in written form; cultural values absent from the numbers, facts, statements.

EXAMPLE: labor Department says that 80 percent of Navajos are unemployed.

EXAMPLE: In the Navajo culture, there is no concept known as unemployment.

- B. INFORMATION: Data that is acted upon becomes information and has an active life that impacts self or others.

Vertical (hierarchy or command)

2. Power vests with the generator; usually used internally to manage others. Meetings take the form of being used to dispense "information." Memos are quite often used to communicate. Interpretation lies with the generator, not the recipient; therefore, data is being dispensed since information cannot be dispensed but must be created through action.

EXAMPLE: An energy company agrees with formal tribal council to help resolve the 80 percent unemployment and hires Navajos to work. Navajo turnover and absenteeism make this a disastrous experience for the company. The company refuses to continue hiring Navajos and conflict ensues and the company is expelled from the reservation with a terrible image of the Navajo people. The company assumed the so-called normal definition of unemployment. The fact of the situation is that there is no Navajo definition in the culture for unemployment. Central powers of both the tribe and company destroyed people, resource and relationships when acting on ungrounded data.

Horizontal (networks or choice)

2. Power vests with the generator who creates consciousness, awareness and understanding of data through networks. Action is externalized to improve survivability, or gain control of outside forces. Explanation and reflection allow the users to express their total selves without fear. Process is usually oral. Action is generated around gatherings and other informal interactive systems. Gatherings (meetings) are for strategy, decision making or action. Information flows in networks around natural routines.

EXAMPLE: Energy company finds natural helpers in the Navajo system which defines work habits and time routines of Navajos. Turning this data into information through sharing of decisions, the energy company designs a hiring system that puts Navajos to work. Navajos, through their networks, make sure all jobs are covered, and power is shared.

C. KNOWLEDGE: Information that is developed, assimilated and used in a conscious and deliberate manner by an individual for whatever purpose is called knowledge.

Vertical (hierarchy or command)

3. Knowledge is created within few individuals. These individuals set the directions for all; power is centralized. Vertical systems have few knowledgeable people to interact, thereby restricting creativity or growth. The result is often domestication of others, doing to or for rather than with. Quite often, a single dimensional system where employees find it difficult to gain information. Accessibility to information is often restricted by structure rather than by conscious action.

EXAMPLE: The resistance of the Hungarian freedom fighters in 1956 was easy to suppress because it was a single dimensional (in one place) and central physical force was easily used to suppress the revolt. There was no external network support, nor did the expected and trusted vertical (U.S.) intervention take place.

NOTE: We have found that the real revolution in the so-called information age is the rapid accessibility to data by everyone, rather than a select few. This has brought about the shift to horizontal management options in many corporations.

Horizontal (networks or choice)

3. Knowledge is created with many individuals. Ease of obtaining and using information, not amount of information, drives the immense amount of interaction. Decentralized power is created with many sharing the same knowledge upon which their action is based. Outside forces cannot control the direction of the people's growth and movement. A multi-dimensional system is created by virtue of the networks. Networks are optimized at this stage with many developing the same knowledge simultaneously.

EXAMPLE: The Polish workers' revolt in 1981 was multi-dimensional (in every part of Poland) and central-physical force could not be used since they could not suppress all sectors simultaneously. There was external horizontal network support for Solidarity throughout the world. This was predicted BEFORE the strike.

D. Wisdom: The positive transformation of knowledge into integrated, predictable results is wisdom.

Wisdom transcends the vertical system, since human outcomes become unpredictable in hierarchy. Networks dominate in helping to create human connectedness and sharing which in turn leads to integration and prediction. A person does not have to become aged in order to operate at the wisdom stage today. Because the sharing and integration of knowledge is the empowerment in today's world, wisdom comes faster. In this stage,

people have intuition about the present and future, having experienced the data, information, and knowledge stages in many diverse situations. There is no fear in your action when you act from wisdom, since total consciousness is attained.