

Asking the Question . . . Do You SEE Brilliance?

In 2010, through my affiliation with Griffith University, I was presented with an opportunity to engage Australian healthcare leaders and academics on a journey to introduce and extend the concept of brilliance in healthcare as a transformation leverage point. This editorial addresses this desire by encouraging a fresh approach. The article probes questions in a fanciful conversation about transformation to stimulate collective creativity by envisioning possibilities for healthcare.

If the emerging understanding of healthcare organisations and systems is of a living human system – an ecology of overlapping, interpenetrating relational spheres – then leadership in this world may be defined as shaping ‘life enhancing’ conditions. Such leadership is both deeply personal and inherently collective. It involves individuals tapping their sources of inspiration and imagination; and it involves collectives actualising emerging futures. It grows from individual and collective discipline, much of which we still grasp only dimly. [1] To tap the source of inspiration and imagination is to make the unconscious conscious, to create the space to let it percolate and emerge from the depths of individual and collective experience. How can this be achieved in organisations driven to improve quality and productivity? Complexity theorists argue that emergence of order from a system is not a magical phenomenon. It is guided: ‘emergence does not simply happen by itself – it involves tending and encouragement from its component agents as well as from a higher level.’ [2,p.6]

Healthcare is a very complex organic system built on and operated by a number of formal and informal networks. The real organisation that you work in is not the official organisation chart. Organisational charts are static images that imply rigid turf boundaries, whereas high performing organisations are as dynamic and fluid as the external environment around them. Fundamentally health system organisations are patterns of energy; a web of relationships, conversations and decisions among people. Relationship building in the white spaces between the black lines on the organisational chart is a key step for network growth.

To quote Margaret Wheatley: ‘As networks grow and transform into active, working communities of practice, we discover how life truly changes, which is through emergence.’ [3,p.1] According to Wheatley, and Freize:

Networks are the only form of organisation on this planet used by living systems. These networks result from self-organisation that fosters emergence, where individuals recognize their interdependence and organize in ways to create solutions that support the diversity and viability of all. Networks create the conditions for emergence which is how life changes. They develop into communities of practice, then into systems. [4,p.2]

Building networks and learning communities requires basic shifts in how we think, reflect and interact. The journey involves an exercise in personal commitment to being open to learning. Without communities of people who are genuinely committed to learning together, there is no real chance of moving forward. [5]

Moving forward, we have all the gifts we need to improve the healthcare system. Every individual who is part of the system carries the seeds of success, skills, talents, potentialities and enthusiasm. Unfortunately the same seeds contain too many intellectual, emotional and systemic barriers. Leaders, all of us need to take action and nurture the growth of those seeds that will allow for a well connected network.

Permit me to take you outside the box and challenge your process of reflection and thinking. There are many formal and informal leaders at all levels of the healthcare system. I hope that many might accept an invitation to join me in a special place, a place of seeing. I call it the balcony of brilliance. Behind an outdated map of the healthcare system I found a secret staircase that leads to a place from which I can see the entire healthcare system.

Everyone can gain access to something similar. I walk up a long flight of stairs, pause to take a breath, say a quiet word of thanks for a rare time to reflect, open the door and step out. From here I look on the vista of the system from the perspective of my professional life. It is special. The air

is rarified. The will is keener here. Intent behind action is stronger. Knowledge is deeply accessed. Other leaders might interpret what they see from here differently, but we can share the same view. Here are the stairs now; the price of admission is a meaningful question. Questions about healthcare brilliance are most welcome.

If I am fortunate, I am joined on the balcony by a Healthcare Muse: an entity that inspires hope and confidence that the next stage in the evolution of a healing healthcare system can be achieved. It seems to study the collective source of thought and feeling. Its current assignment is to guide the regeneration of the core of the health system. This core is the 'place' where our collective psyche and spirit are preparing to meet in the process of creating a healing system that is itself healthy.

I ask the Muse questions about the brilliance of the system. The reply comes from the compassionate perspective of 'dynamic wholeness': a system that is cohesive; flexible; interconnected; cost-effective; orderly; vital; and that values the commitment of people above all else. This does not mean perfect. Dynamic wholeness means that error and waste still occur, but they arise from prudent risk and experimentation that lead to insight. This ultimately fuels renewal. We discuss sustainability from many perspectives, both ancient and modern. The Muse is highly intuitive. It sees where current trends are headed and comments about our choices. It suggests options and provides information.

Why does it dialogue with me? For many years I have studied leadership development and change management. My early dialogues were reflections on changing behaviour, especially in challenging areas of conflict management such as labour relations. What is the most important thing I did? I asked myself and others this question again and again: 'What do you see?'

The 'Healthcare Muse' is a collection of thought gained from both informal and formal leaders who provide me with many gifts. Imagine all the conversations and debates of many years boiled down into one radiant point of contact for reflection and insight.

It is not really a Muse, of course. Some might say, technically, that it is the 'illusory expression of a grandiose complex', or, simply and dismissively, a fantasy. The problem with such explanations is that they do not really contribute to understanding experience. My test for our conversation is its practical utility.

You might consider a conversation with your own Muse. If authentic, it will respect your unique role. It will present insights that honour your point of view and responsibilities. It will help you question: 'Is the search for universal "truth" about healing systems valid?' (this depends upon your assumptions about universality, truth, healing and validity). I try to keep an open mind. I try to be guided by the authority of knowledge from many cultures about systems that have stood the test of time, as well as by new research. But let's not be too academic. Come along and listen to the start of a conversation. Make up your own mind.

Good day, and welcome to you. I am 'The Healthcare Muse', my name is Bloggette. Please begin with your first question.

I want to learn how to stimulate learning across the healthcare system. How can we encourage formal and informal leaders at all levels to search for and talk about healthcare brilliance? Everyone is tired of the quick-fix that achieves no real effect. We want people to use questioning – to create the systemic conditions from which real solutions to today's challenges arise.

You also want people to learn, from their personal reflections, what will enable them to outgrow constraints in the current collective approach to healthcare, is that not so?

Yes. The connection between personal and professional growth is vital...Where do we begin?

It's leveraging brilliance. What I know for certain is that healthcare people are capable of brilliance. I know the answers to the questions we need to learn are within their hearts and minds.

Where do we access the brilliance?

The healthcare system embodies the highest order and purpose – to foster life, health and well-being through knowledge and service at each stage in the cycle of life. And we can go beyond merely thinking about and acting within structures and systems to actually connecting the system with life itself. We can align ourselves with the consciousness that enables the system to support life; the higher purpose of a healing system. Therefore, it is important to recognise that people bring gifts to work every day. The magic is the finding of the gifts. When you appreciate people for their gifts, they are pleased to reveal them more deeply and more frequently.

Can you comment on the leadership functions that enable human and organisational systems to grow and shine?

I believe leaders must; find, mind, grind and bind. Let me explain:

- **Find** – consciousness seeks itself through environmental scanning, often by searching for opportunity, sensing its relation to the world and what is needed to evolve. And finding takes courage. You can't find unless you stand reciprocally in light and shadow.
- **Mind** – integrating sensory mind, the intellect and self reflection principles into a field of conscious awareness. And mind must be mined. Once found you must dig into collective mind and honour its treasures.
- **Grind** – holding the tension created by polarities and conflict of opposites, so that the issue is worn smooth by its friction, like grinding a lens. This requires surrounding yourself with people who will keep you honest.
- **Bind** – as an organic principle of connection in depth, to create the 'glue' that holds the fabric of systems together. This manifests when there is great commitment to accountability and reliance upon the principle of truth, so central to risk management.

I get it. It is all about the choices you make.

Yes. Let me share a story with you. An elder from the Cherokee nation was teaching his grandchildren about life. He told them:

'A fight is going on inside me, it is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, arrogance, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, resentment and inferiority.

The other wolf represents hope, sharing, humility, relationships, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, community and brilliance.

This same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too.'

One child asked the elder: 'Which wolf will win?'

The elder simply replied: 'The one you feed.'

Let's begin a journey of feeding BRILLIANCE.

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Meet our Global Health Leader

Health reformer
Change leader
Surfer

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