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Timely and Transforming Leadership Inquiry and Action: Toward Triple-loop Awareness

Anne Starr and Bill Torbert

Abstract: Drawing from situations in business, art, leadership education, and home life, this essay experiments with diverse ways to communicate the experience of triple-loop awareness. Contrasting it with single- and double-loop feedback in a person's awareness, the triple-loop supposedly affords the capacity to be fully present and exercise re-visioning, frame-changing timely leadership. The essay presents an encompassing theory of time and of its relationship with our own capacity for awareness. The experiment concludes with the reminder to readers that a first reading is like walking around the base of a mountain. The authors invite readers to try out one of the uphill paths of being with these experiments with a different kind of attention.

Key words: action-logic, awareness, inquiry, leadership, learning, re-visioning, timely action, theory of time, transformation, triple-loop

Introduction

This essay consists of a number of qualitatively different example-experiments to communicate the experience of triple-loop awareness, which supposedly gives participants in any social process the capacity to be fully present and to exercise re-visioning, frame-changing leadership in a timely fashion.

In order to begin displaying and playing with the distinctions and relationships among single-, double-, and triple-loop inquiry and action, the first several mini-essays are portraits of particular situations in business, art, leadership education, and home life. The final experiments occur in the course of presenting a more encompassing theory of time itself.

Our aim is to point toward the qualities of triple-loop awareness, even though we will also claim that the experience of triple-loop awareness is always more than thought or words. We hope to illustrate this experience vividly enough to interest you in the new freedom, mutuality, power and efficacy such awareness-in-action promises.

Overall, this essay will, of course, interweave us, the authors, and you our readers, through the resonances among all of these example-experiments and your own experiments with your attention as you read and amidst your other activities. Initially, of course, you may find yourself reading in the habitual linear sequence of the journal layout, perhaps doing some incremental, single-loop learning about the concepts discussed.

Eventually, if you wish, you may choose how to approach the article more playfully, weaving your attention back and forth among the portraits, seeking to encompass a whole new pattern of thought or to find just what this approach reconstructs about your way of thinking and acting.

This may possibly catalyze (the beginning or acceleration of) a longer-term double-loop change in your thinking-in-action (or action-logic).

...Or perhaps, you may find yourself playing with the very attention you are using during this reading (in one exercise we will explicitly ask you to do this) – thus possibly experiencing what we call triple-loop inquiry and awareness as you read.

Brief Illustrations of Triple-loop Inquiry and Awareness in Action in an MBA Leadership Workshop

In the closing two minutes of an MBA Leadership Workshop on a February evening of 2005, a student says, “We’re beginning to get the idea of single-loop learning, where you see you didn’t get the result you wanted during a conversation, or in hitting the nail you’re trying to drive into a beam, so you make little corrective changes in your way of talking or listening or hammering, and sometimes you pretty quickly get the result you were hoping for. Several of us have told good stories of just listening a little more carefully and then asking a question about what the other’s saying, and feeling the whole ‘weather’ of that relationship change...”

“And I think a lot of us have a feel for double-loop learning too (and why it’s less usual, but more important for a good leader to be able to do), where sometimes you realize the wood’s so hard you’d better switch to a screwdriver and screw or, say, change what result you’re even trying to get in your conversation. So, those are starting to make a little sense...”

“But what’s this triple-loop idea that – whether in our own 1st-person awareness, or in a 2nd-person conversation within a team, or in a much larger 3rd-person social organizing process – we can sometimes change, not just our specific actions, and not even just our overall strategies, but also (and somehow, supposedly most powerful of all) our very present awareness so that we feel our own presence and that of everything around us?” (pause, before student continues)

“...Actually, our consultant, Grace, gave our Learning Team a good example of single-, double-, and triple-loop learning tonight, but we still can’t see how the triple-loop part works. She pointed out that a room temperature thermostat is built to permit the occupants to set a limit such that the furnace then turns off or on at the limit, making repeated single-loop changes from off to on or vice versa at that limit.”

“Of course, the thermostat is also built to permit occupants to change the limits, and she said that’s an example of a double-loop change -- changing the parameters.”

“When we asked her what triple-loop change would be in that example, she said triple-loop change is when, in February in Boston, an occupant blows a gasket and flies to Costa Rica for a week. (Laughter from the class) But, you know, like how are we supposed to do something like that at work in the middle of the day?”

The instructor pauses, surveying the class, and nods to one member who looks like excited words are about to emerge. She says she thinks she’s recognized a triple-loop awareness generating phenomenon on a relatively large social scale, as she’s been listening. She speaks of being visually ravished by some e-pics her sister in New York City has sent her of the Christos’ Orange Gates installation in Central Park.

“It’s taken 26 years since conception to get done,” volunteers another student, “And it’s only up for two weeks before they take all 7,500 gates and orange flags down again.”

“It’s got people from all over the country coming,” said another. “Even Europeans.”

“And,” the original speaker pipes in again, “I read where they say the biggest miracle of all is that it’s getting millions of New Yorkers to wake up with a goofy smile on their faces and rediscover their center. Central Park seen as though for the first time. A kind of “waking up” where you and the phenomenon become unusually present to one another, passing through our perceptual and conceptual filters with less distortion and more wonder than usual. Don’t you think that, after they come down, those orange gates may wake a few of them up again later by their very absence? Are they powerful enough to portend a new period of hope after the nightmare of 9/11?”

“Maybe the Orange Gates are a good example of all the preparation that can go into a few moments of truly timely action on a spiritual/historical scale,” the instructor adds weightily. “Think of how short a time it took for Socrates to have his final inquiring conversation with his friends before ending his life by drinking the hemlock, yet how long that event has been re-awakening inquiry within Western civilization. Do you think the flavor of the Orange Gates will inspire re-awakening inquiry for as long as that? In the meantime, we still have the question about how to generate this kind of experience in the middle of a work day. Right now, it seems to me, the timely action is to end class. Can we do so without ending this fresh feeling of inquiry-in-action?”

Definition, Figure, Mathematical Analogy, and Experiential Test

During the following class, the instructor offers a number of scholarly, definitional statements about single-, double-, and triple-loop awareness, such as:

First-order change is incremental, involving behavioral adjustments. ...Second-order change refers to change in cognitive frameworks underlying the organization’s activities... Third-order change ...give(s) organization members the opportunity to transcend schemata (and to) recognize how this schema and all schemata limit as well as guide understanding. ...Third-order change... presumes experience that is transconceptual. (Bartunek & Moch, 1994, 24-25)

Translating, he explains that triple-loop awareness re-presents a change in consciousness. It is the simultaneous awareness of all 4 territories of experience – of the outside world, one’s own behavior, one’s own feelings and thoughts, and at the same time, a kind of witnessing of all this. It can be called presencing (Senge et al, 2004). Triple loop awareness occurs in any moment when there’s an attention distinct from the mental thinking, from the physical sensing, and from the objects of perception, infusing them all with an immediacy that is at once passionate, dispassionate, and compassionate. You’re more likely to have these experiences when you put yourself in a position where you’re on the edge of your known reality – on the not-necessarily-comfortable threshold between the known and the unknown. The instructor also offers the following skeletal illustration of single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback to go with the definition (see Figure 1).

The instructor suggests that objects in the external world are solid, earth-like, distinguishable and countable in interval/ratio terms (how many chairs in the room, how many dollars in my wallet, how many apple pies made). By contrast, the world of sensations and behaviors is describable and enactable in liquid, moving, ordinal, sequential terms (to cook a pie, first you do

this, then that). The world of thought and strategy functions in airy, symbolic, nominal, relational, systems terms (e.g. a conceptual map). And the world of attention engages us with the entire aesthetic continuum from the fire-like, noumenal, non-dual origin of the empty light of attention itself, through our nominal categories of thought into the ordinal priority and sequence of our actions, to the interval accounting of the results we achieve.

Attention/Intention

Triple-loop feedback

Thought/Strategy

Double-loop feedback

Sensations/Behaviors

Single-loop feedback

Perceptions/Outcomes in External World



Figure 1: Single-, Double-, and Triple-Loop Feedback Within a Given Person's Awareness

In this context, the instructor offers the class what he calls a first-person experiment in generating triple-loop transconceptual, noumenal experience. He hands out single sheets of paper with the following instructions and asks everyone to spend the next three minutes listening to themselves "playing" silently with its suggestions, as we now suggest our readers do:

0. Zero. Origin. Noumenon.

Imagine that you are present in the present... that you can feel your own presence and other presences around you now...

How do you "imagine" this?

Are you merely thinking about these words as you read, or are you actually trying to feel yourself from the inside, becoming more aware of how your body feels now?

And, as for the other presences around you, are you becoming more aware, not just of the meaning of these words as you read, but also of their physical presence as ciphers on this page?

And the other people around you or the chair you're sitting on? How are you feeling their presences?

How does this waking up to your own and others' presence in the present feel?

How are you doing it?

Is "doing it" changing the pace and the way you read?

Can you "keep doing it" if you close your eyes?

Or are you "just reading" again?

Gleaned from an On-line Community of Practice Conversation among Developmental Consultants

Continuing our lightning-quick switches of frame, we turn from passionate, physical illustrations of triple-loop awareness (thermostats and orange gates) and from dispassionate intellectual illustrations of triple-loop experience (definitions, models, and an experiment with the mathematics of experience) to a compassionate, emotional illustration of how a professional organizational consultant, executive coach, or couples therapist can listen to clients. This statement was offered by Steve March in an e-mail conversation among a group of professionals dedicated to learning more about “integral theory and practice.”

“I can *listen for clients’ thematic patterns or patterns of action* during the meeting and propose or enact alternative patterns. This sort of listening and intervention can generate some important single-loop learnings on their part that can help clients improve their situation and the effectiveness of their interactions.”

“A second more subtle and more difficult way I can listen to clients is to *listen to their way of listening* – in particular to what they *aren’t* listening to. From this kind of listening I may suggest and try out with them a whole new practice that can help them make a double-loop change in their action-logic and embody that change in their way of listening.”

“A third way of listening is to hear both of the levels already mentioned and at the same time to *listen to my listening of the client’s listening*. How is the client showing up in my total experience? What am I feeling – emotionally and somatically? How am I being triggered? Who am I being such that this is the client I experience? I find, more and more, that this last question orients the unfoldment of my coaching.”

Single-, Double-, and Triple-Loop Learning Interweaving in the Same Event

Single-, double-, and triple-loop learning may all occur in the course of the same momentary experience. For example,

“I’ve been talking and fighting and weeping with my wife all night long and into the morning hours, trying gently and patiently to reassure her that, despite whatever vibes she thought she saw between me and another (also married) woman at the other end of a long dinner table from where she was seated when we dined at our friends yesterday evening, I do love her and have no intention of leaving her.

“As the morning continues without resolution, beyond exhausted, I remember a friend once saying that if all the different things you’re trying aren’t working, you should try the last thing you would ever think to do in this situation (thus, freeing yourself from the grip of your false assumptions).

“Right now, that would mean getting angry at my wife. I can’t imagine how that would reassure her, nor can I imagine what I have to be angry about. Then I remember that I have recently been teased about never getting angry. Maybe I can never imagine why I should be angry, but maybe I actually am angry without realizing it. Maybe I am rationalizing away an anger I’m not letting myself feel.

“I realize intellectually that I may be at my assumptive limit. And I’m certainly exhausted – at my physical/emotional limits. So, not even knowing what I will say, I start

making an angry roaring sound, and, to my surprise, hear myself yelling at her that she doesn't trust me and my love for her. That feels totally true to me. She immediately quiets down, begins to weep in a different way, as do I, and we're out of the cycle."

Here, the speaker finally accepts the single-loop feedback that he is not reaching his goal of reassuring his wife. He next remembers a different, rationally preposterous strategy that is outside his current action-logic (double-loop feedback). He begins to rationalize about the strategy rather than acting on it, then sees that that's what he's doing (triple-loop feedback that changes his awareness). He then acts in a way that validates the single-loop learning by achieving the original goal, as well as in a way that validates the double-loop learning by the very uniqueness-for-him of the action, and that continues the triple-loop learning for a few moments of spacious high wonderment, seeing himself seeing, hearing himself speaking, and feeling the transformative alchemy work through them both.

Interweaving a Theory of Time with a Theory of Developing Awareness of Time

In recent work (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Torbert, 1991; Torbert & Associates, 2004), a group of our colleagues have been highlighting a three-dimensional theory of time (and this theory is also either implicit or explicit in a number of other works related to quantum physics and consciousness research [e.g. Priestley, 1964; Malin, 2001; Purser & Petranker, 2003; Senge et al, 2004]). As we will see below, developmental theory traces the path by which people can come 1) to interweave single-, double-, and triple-loop awareness; 2) to experience the three dimensions of time (or the six dimensions of space/time; and 3) to engage in powerful, vulnerable, transforming, and timely leadership action.

One of the basic ideas of the three-dimensional theory of time-experiencing is that we are ordinarily 0-dimensional time beings, altogether time-oblivious (e.g. when engaged in a repetitive task, when driving and daydreaming, when enthralled by what we are reading, or when asleep). In addition, we are episodically 1-dimensional time beings, aware of linear chronological time (e.g. when waiting impatiently for someone who's late, or when rushing to meet a deadline). These may be named zero-dimensional time-awareness and one-dimensional time-awareness.

In its most sophisticated forms, one-dimensional time-awareness can be cultivated into an awareness of psychological and historical patterns that inform current actions (this type of sophistication is found also in the historical theories of evolution and development that have characterized both the social and natural sciences during the 20th century).

One-dimensional time awareness of sequential passing time permits us potentially to act, then identify a gap between act and intended outcome, then adjust one's action, and achieve one's goal (maybe), thus doing single-loop learning. Developmental theory and research (see Table 1) suggest that only a minority of managers and executives develop to the Achiever action-logic where they are capable of reliable single-loop

Table 1: Seven Leadership Action-Logics (adapted from Rooke & Torbert "Seven Transformations of Leadership" *Harvard Business Review* April 2005, with permission)

Action Logics	% of 4,310 research sample profiling at this action logic	Characteristics	Strengths
Opportunist	5%	<i>Wins any way possible.</i> Self-oriented, manipulative, "might makes right." Masters the outside world.	Good in emergencies or brief sales opportunities.
Diplomat	12%	<i>Avoids overt conflict.</i> Desperately wants to belong. Masters own behavior to fit group norms	Good as supportive glue within an office.
Expert	38%	<i>Rules by logic and expertise.</i> Always seeks the rational way. Masters some professional field of thought.	Good as an individual contributor.
Achiever	30%	<i>Meets strategic goals.</i> Juggles managerial duties and market demands. Uses single-loop feedback to work effectively with teams.	Well-suited to managerial roles; action and goal oriented.
Individualist	10%	<i>Interweaves competing personal and company action logics.</i> Encourages public reflection, creates unique structures to resolve gaps between strategy and performance.	Effective in venture and consulting roles.
Strategist	4%	<i>Generates organizational and personal transformation.</i> Exercises the power of mutual inquiry, vigilance, and vulnerability to generate double-loop change.	Effective as transformational leaders.
Alchemist	1%	<i>Inquires, listens, and acts.</i> Integrates material, social, and spiritual transformation through triple-loop awareness.	Good at generating society-wide transformation.

learning in the midst of ongoing action (Torbert & Associates, 2004; Rooke & Torbert, (2005). An even smaller percentage of adult professionals are measured as Strategists who reliably engage in double-loop learning and reliably generate successful developmental transformation (Rooke & Torbert, 1998). And only 1% transform to the Alchemist action-logic that is devoted to sustainable moment-to-moment triple-loop learning and awareness. Double- and triple-loop

awareness introduce us to the second and third dimensions of time, which are hidden within durational or passing time.

The second dimension of time can be imagined geometrically as orthogonal to linear durational time from the past to the future, passing through the present. From the point of view of our ordinary (zero or one-dimensional) temporal awareness, the present is a vanishingly small instant that can never be grasped because it is past by the time that its sensations, thoughts and feelings register within us. Is there a different quality of awareness that permits a timeless, conscious experiencing of the present – a quality of awareness that permits us to live nowhere but the present... inhabiting the eternal present in all of its unfolding fullness... experiencing a sense of our own presence and of other presences around us even while remembering something, or focusing on a particular task, or imagining a possible future? When smelling a flower, or facing a sunset, or embracing (and being embraced by) a beloved, many of us are occasionally graced by contemplative moments of harmony and communion... a conscious experiencing of presence-sensitivity-receptivity in what feels like an “eternal now” (in Latin this was called the “Nunc Stans,” the “Standing Now”). Similarly, we may experience vivid moments of disharmony as when we “see” that our practice contradicts our own espoused principle. But, paradoxically, these eternal moments of “time out of time” usually soon fade.

A third dimension of time can again be imagined as orthogonal (the Z axis) to the plane defined by chronological time (X axis) and eternity (Y axis). The three-dimensional “volume” of time can be imagined as holding all possibilities, all the potentialities of the future and the still-hidden meanings of the past, some of which emerge into the present (become act-ualized) and then pass into linear, historical time, through a translation process that quantum physics now describes as a “quantum collapse” (Ho, 2001; Malin, 2001).

What is actual... consists of both objects and subjects in a dance, or flow. Each new subject is constituted in part by antecedent actualities, but each new moment of experience, in addition to its physical constituents, is also a *creative subject* which exercises its freedom and creativity to unify *in the moment* its constituent completed moments of experience. Each object is an expired experience...; *and then* these objects provide the raw material for subsequent subjects... And so the cycle proceeds from subject to object to subject to object (de Quincey, 1999, 99).

Is there really a different quality of awareness that goes beyond a deepened sense of presence in the present to sensing oneself as a creative subject actively participating in midwifing an emerging future (Senge et al, 2004)? As a first taste, we offer the following meditation written in January 2005 by Maria, a woman in her thirties, who had been a member of a spiritual group seeking such heightened awareness, but had recently recognized that it was fraudulent and that she was being manipulated into donating a large proportion of her time and money to an organization in which she shared no control. Now faced with questions of love, marriage, and faith tradition (she Catholic, her fiancé Islamic), she writes:

I'm tired of pretending
 To believe what I don't
 I'm tired of pretending
 I'll do what I won't.
 I'm tired of pretending
 I want what I “ought”

I'm tired of pretending
To be what I'm not.

I'm ready to see
What I previously couldn't.
I'm ready to want
What I want, though I "shouldn't."
I'm ready for answers
That come from me.
I'm ready, so ready
To finally be free.

Here, the writer seems very much "on the edge" of her known reality – on the not-necessarily-comfortable threshold between the known and the unknown, between the present and the future. Is she really ready as she says she is? In the passion, dispassion, and compassion (for herself) of writing this meditation, she may have momentarily been truly experiencing a birthing of triple-loop awareness. Yet her previous "pretending" had surely not all been intentional pretending. Often, no doubt, she had been convinced at the time that she wanted what she "ought." Has the experiential awareness of simultaneous completion with the past and emptiness of the future (not more of the same) lasted beyond the writing of the meditation? Does it return often? Or has the memory of the writing replaced her live experiencing of presence on the verge of the volume of possibility?

The following story from an autobiographical course paper illustrates a longer visit to this world of surprising presencing, followed by the writer's reflections on the aftermath:

My older brother became ill, a reality almost impossible for me to accept as he was amongst my greatest life allies.

I visited him in Mill Valley and when there saw his terrible degradation. He didn't recognize me, mistaking me for a nurse though I had called to announce my arrival only 30 minutes before. I followed him into his office where he announced authoritatively, looking at his calendar, "My sister is due here at 11:00." Self-medicating, he had frightening overdoses with alarming falls and dangerous accidents in the kitchen. His pitifully thin body was bruised and cut where he had hurt himself.

Toward the end of my short visit I sat with a circle of his close friends, the hospice nurse and him. I was stunned and devastated, uncertain of myself. His friends were half-playfully chastising him, complaining about how difficult he was and how they worried about him, which he bore with his usual blend of humor, charisma and humility. In the midst of hearing all this, the thought came to me: I will come back to live with him and take care of him. I said so right then and the clarity of my statement and power of my intention were like the quiet birth of a new reality.

I went back to Boston and moved as if watching myself from above. I did not know how I would do it but knew I would with a certainty that was as though it were already true. My boss, who normally complained if I wanted to take any time away from work, didn't even question me. I seemingly effortlessly found someone to live in my house indefinitely. Two technical people emerged and with grace and patience, connected me

remotely to what I needed for work. Twelve days after I returned from San Francisco, I flew back there to live.

Thus began five of the most intimate, terrifying, hilarious, and grief stricken months of my life. I only worked when my brother didn't need me and learned a new trust that time would cooperate with what had to be done. As it turned out those five months were incredibly prolific and financially rewarding, and I found I liked my work more than ever before. I loved my brother's created extended family and with their help learned how to take care of him. In some ways this was my most satisfying creation: it was instantaneous in conception and fell into place like magic - its heart energy so strong and its intention so clear, nothing would stop it. It felt to me like a magician time, where the conception is the creation and time folds to meet any contingency.

Quite apart from the profound personal experience that this was for me, it was also an unprecedented experience of a new kind of power. Being a constitutional worrywart, I was accustomed to thinking with limitation – seeing the barriers (in the “real” world) associated with attaining my desires (in “here”) as overwhelming. The emotional shock of this situation gave me a power and clarity I had not experienced before. Instead of seeing limitation, I saw only my intention and knew there were any number of ways it would be met. My desires and the real world were interacting in real time (the present). I never forced a connection or answer, but instead *knew* that things would fall into place. This felt physically like operating from above myself with infinite flexibility to play/enact in the world “below”. I should also say that I have not summoned this kind of power since then – unfortunately, not even to write this paper (Anonymous, 2004, with permission).

Here, we hear of a prolonged experience of a purportedly altered state of consciousness generated in part, it certainly seems, by the emotional shock this woman experienced in the face of her brother's imminent death and in part by defining for herself a very practical role to play that kept her entrained in the ongoing daily presence of this most dramatic of human transformations. While it was going on it gave her an unprecedented freedom of action and self-determination. But as she says, this extraordinary time also ended, and did not leave her with a reliable capacity to recreate that state.

Is it even conceivable that there is a spiritual/political/scientific/business inquiry and practice aimed at generating an ongoing triple-loop awareness that transforms outcomes through changing the quality of one's actions, of one's action-logics, and of one's very attention? To what degree can what kind of a spiritual community of inquiry support one's efforts toward a trans-conceptual awareness that can host all three dimensions of time – 1) the “line” of mundane, durational activity; 2) the archetypal, eternal, fractal “circles” of time that durational activity embodies; and 3) the “volume” of possibilities, from which spontaneous, imp-possible, trickster-ish violations of past pattern are drawn? These questions carry us beyond the boundary of this short article. Let us instead contemplate one more example of a particular business leader who seems to integrate action and inquiry on an ongoing basis.

Warren Buffett, an Exemplar of Triple-loop Awareness and Action?

For the many who believe that material success in business and life requires opportunistic cutting of corners, it may come as a surprise that we will tout one of the richest men alive as an intuitive practitioner of single-, double-, and triple-loop learning for whom integrity, mutuality, sustainability, and inquiry are truly primary in his life and work. We are speaking of none other than the Oracle of Omaha, investor Warren Buffett. Buffett's entire theory of value-based investing requires constant inquiry into specific companies, as well as mutual inquiry with the leadership of those companies, rather than formulaic responses to the stock market or particular industries. His approach also relies profoundly on self-oriented inquiry, in order to know the edges of what he calls one's "circle of competence" as precisely as possible and not make investments outside it.

Buffett approaches the companies he invests in as partners he wishes to relate to over the longest possible term, rather than as subordinates he can dominate or fleece in the short-term. He does the same with his shareholders at Berkshire Hathaway annual meetings, with reporters, and with business students. Rather than pontificating, he turns each encounter into an opportunity for open inquiry and gains trust through his self-deprecating humor and honesty. His basic principle of conversation and political practice is simple: "Never lie under any circumstances." (The *principle* is simple; *living up to it* is a complex work of art.) Or, as his friend Charlie Munger puts it, "One of the reasons Warren is so cheerful is he doesn't have to remember his lines."

But, the reader may ask, in what ways is Buffett transformational? He appears to have done much the same things his entire adult life. He has lived in the same home and eaten the same junk foods most of that time. Early on, he created a financial vehicle to give the vast preponderance of his fortune away and has stuck with it. And most of his close friends claim they've never known anyone who remains more the same.

True (although the very idea [not to mention the actual practice] of giving your fortune away before you've even earned it is a wee bit unusual and would require a huge personal transformation for many a businessperson). Yet it is also true that Warren's wife Suzie brought him out of his introverted self in a new way and taught him how to make friends across wide differences during his twenties and thirties. He's also changed from the Republican to the Democratic Party, a pretty unusual move. And in the past decade he's gone from being virtually a lone investor to being one of the largest employers in the US.

But perhaps the most striking, virtually instantaneous reversal of frame on a large scale that Buffett has accomplished occurred in 1991 when Shearson-Lehman fired its CEO as an ethics scandal broke. Buffett (a large shareholder) received a call early one Friday morning asking him to step in as interim CEO and try to rescue the company. By Sunday evening, he was closing in on choosing a permanent successor through an inquiry he had begun with senior management, and had met with the press for hours that afternoon, answering every question as honestly as possible. His presence, integrity, and collaborative inquiry transformed the credibility of the company almost instantly and it was saved.

And how about Warren's and Suzie's and Irene's act of transforming the notion of a romantic triangle? We usually imagine a romantic triangle as a temporary, unsustainable way of secretly cheating. But these three created a romantic triangle that was mutually honest, respectful, loving, publicly-acknowledged, and sustained until Suzie's recent death. Obviously, such an ongoing relationship is potentially susceptible to any number of jealousies and two-on-one power plays, unless all three persons continually enact each of the three couple relationships within the larger frame of concern for the unique triangular relationship as a whole. (If readers are interested in

evidence for this characterization, or just in sheer inspiration, we recommend that you order a copy of the 2004 Charlie Rose PBS interview with Suzie Buffett only months before her death.)

A final indication, both humorous and serious, of Buffett's trans-egoic perspective on his activities is his final letter to his Berkshire Hathaway shareholders, which he has already written and which will be released the day after his death, continuing his frame-changing leadership. It begins, "Dear Shareholders, Yesterday I died. This is bad news for me but not for you..."

Conclusion

This essay has consisted of a number of qualitatively different experiments to communicate the experience of triple-loop awareness, which supposedly gives participants in any social process the capacity to be fully present and to exercise re-visioning, frame-changing leadership in a timely fashion. The examples have been drawn from particular situations in business, art, leadership education, and home life. We have also presented an encompassing theory of time itself and of its inextricable relationship with our own capacity for awareness.

If you have reached this point in the article after having read straight through it, please recall our admonition in the introduction that it is unlikely you will have yet achieved a satisfactory sense of comprehension, completion, and conclusion. Reading the article once through is like walking around the base of a mountain. Now, perhaps, your attention can try one of the uphill paths toward the peak of this little mountain of meaning (Daumal, 1974). What would it mean to play with the very attention we are exercising as we read, as we suggested in the introduction?

In other words, to what degree may it be possible to live, on an ongoing or many-times-a-day-returning basis, within in a six-dimensional horizon of conscious inquiry into the life and death of particular events, particular thought-episodes, and particular feelings, as well as of the sense of fractal patterns among them, not to mention the subjectively presencing origin toward whom our attention turneth when we seek through our winters and into our springs?

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