

3. When you feel bruised in organizations, who are some of the individuals you can approach for help?

REFERENCES

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2.9 Powers of Perception

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Keywords: adaptive culture, decision-making, innovation, leadership, learning organization, perception, planning, problem solving, situation analysis, strategy, systems thinking

Courses this story could be used in: Principles of Management, Leadership, Organizational Behavior, Workplace Diversity, Change Management, Management Communication

Keywords: organizational change, group dynamics, group-based problem-solving organizational decision-making, the learning organization and the perceptual organization, systems thinking

THE STORY

The story of the ancient Polynesian navigators provides insights for modern organizations who wish to navigate their journey toward wisdom. Studies of Polynesian maritime skills reveal a stunning array of techniques that enabled voyaging across extensive distances to make a landfall. Star compasses that divided the horizon into thirty-two sectors were aligned with markers to determine the star path, and the Southern Cross could be used for long periods as it changed its attitude in the night sky. The ocean swell guided canoes by day and steering was as much a matter of feel as it was of sight. The flight path of migratory birds and seabirds that returned to land at night provided important information. Cloud formations over high islands and the influence

of land on ocean swells helped the navigators identify land from as far as fifty–ninety kilometers away. Coral atolls produced unique cloud formations that provided important information for seasoned navigators. For example, islands with heavy vegetation gave darker tinge, while those with white sand gave bright sheen. Also integral to a navigator’s repertoire in reading the signposts of nature was the importance of understanding the trade winds (G. Irwin in Howe, 2006: 80; D. Lewis in Walker, 1990/2004: 26–27).

The traditional navigators employed a system of mental mapping whereby they could estimate latitude to within half a degree of error from the angle of stars in the sky. Additionally, by maintaining a running estimation of position through dead reckoning, using calculations based on course (compensated for current), elapsed time, and estimated speed, they could work out the position of new islands (G. Irwin in Howe, 2006: 80).

Three elements of traditional navigation, steering a course at sea, maintaining a running fix of position, and making an island landfall, have been tested by modern GPSs as reliable methods and they reveal mistakes typically occurring randomly and over the course of a voyage cancel one another out (*ibid.*). Today, traditional Melanesian sailors can be taken blindfolded to any point of the ocean and they will be able to recognize the spot by the feel of the currents on their bodies (Csikzentmihaly, 1990: 33).

Reading the signposts of nature and drawing on sensory knowledge in order to better understand a situation can be comprehended through Te Kete Aronui, one of the three baskets of knowledge retrieved by Tāwhaki from the abode of Io—the creator of the cosmos (see story “The Wisdom of Knowledge” by C. Spiller in this book). Te Kete Aronui calls for engaging the five senses in how humans experience “that before us”: the natural world as apprehended by the senses (Marsden, 2003: 61; Shirres, 1997: 17–18). Through cultivating deep awareness of natural phenomena, it is possible to develop “extra-sensory faculties and techniques” that were traditionally used to “test” the environment and “new phenomena” (Marsden, 2003: 61). Te Kete Aronui can act as a sensory portal through which people can gain a deeper understanding of the world, and it connects to Te Kete Tuauri and Te Kete Tuatea, psychic and spiritual knowledge. Te Kete Aronui can lead people to a deeper experience of the “senses behind the senses” (Shirres, 1997: 17).

REFLECTION POINTS

This story highlights the importance of developing perception skills to better see what is really going on. It offers organizational leaders an opportunity to encourage their staff to be open to, and aware of, a variety of the stimuli that determine the different ways people look at a similar situation—rather than operating out of habit, which can keep them locked in “psychic prisons.” An important reflection this story touches upon is the need for organizations to develop high levels of responsiveness among all its members in order that the organization as a whole can better navigate the seas of uncertainty and change.

THREE QUESTIONS

1. How do you “read the signposts” and course correct? How much is your organization missing out on because everyone is too focused on the final destination, that is, the next quarter’s bottom line, the fulfillment of the business plan, the communications plan, the marketing plan, or the KPI?
2. What systems do you have in place for people to achieve perceptual ability?
3. How many kinds of intelligences do you foster in the workplace? Is every member of the organization really able see what is going on?

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2.10 The Anti-Hurry-Scurry-Worry Pill

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Keywords: power, influence, fear, motivation, empathy, humor, entrepreneurship