

Synergy and Synchronicity
Building Powerful Relationships
By Robert Porter Lynch
copyright 2002-2006

One of the deepest desires of any normal human being is to be harmonized, synchronized and unified with others, as brother, sister, husband, wife, father, mother, neighbor, or friend. It is this common unity that underpins marriage, family, teamwork, community, alliances, nations, and the world of humankind. Yet it remains our most thwarted and elusive goal.

The “Quest for Synergy” is, at the same time, mankind’s highest aspiration, loftiest ideal, and most soulful yearning. “Synergy” is the elusive but alluring song of all teams and alliances. Its archetypal attraction is bound in its possibility of creating something more the sum of its parts. Synergy captivates all, escapes most, briefly visits some, and for the blessed few, bestows enormous wealth and success.

What then is the magic of synergy? Or is magic at all? The quest of every team or leader is to find this holy grail -- the formula or architecture that will manifest this gallant goddess with singular regularity; to unveil synergy’s secrets like Edison’s applications of the power of electricity or the Wright brothers manifesting man’s ability to fly.

The Illusion -- What’s Missing?

Not understanding the essential nature of synergy results in comments like these:

“We know how to create alliances, but don’t know how to manage them!”
reflected one American top executive, who lamented the lack of success in achieving his alliance’s primary goals.

“Government needs cooperation and coordination if we are to be efficient. However, we never seem to get alignment between the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments. Sometimes we get in bitter entanglements. It doesn’t look very good when the press gets hold of it,” was the complaint of a deputy minister in a Canadian province.

“Our internal teamwork is terrible. We can’t get any cross-functional group to work. People seem to build internal walls between our departments,” groused a senior executive who watched his company polarize in the face of increasing competition and customer demands.

“It looked great on paper, but it was a terrible fit in reality. Our cultures clashed on every issue from decision making processes to rewarding our sales force;” stated a dejected alliance manager in the pharmaceutical industry.

“During negotiations, the deal makers poisoned the well, and we haven’t yet recovered. We had to undo all the damage caused by the adversary legal jargon;” was the battle-weary response of the president of a multi-billion dollar international joint venture.

“Alliances are an unnatural act for us. They are extremely difficult to manage; we’d prefer to do acquisitions; that way we can control them,” complained a senior vice president of a large German chemical manufacturer. Later, he noted that 30% of his revenues and nearly 50% of his division’s profits came from alliances, but *“we spend only 5% of our management time on them.”* For some inexplicable reason he failed to allocate management resources to the highest profit generator in his business.

“Our acquisitions are largely a failure. We’ve bought very successful companies, but soon afterward the best of all the newly acquired people drift off into other jobs. Then the real problems begin...customers are lost, profits decline, innovation wanes....” was the sad comment of a chief financial officer.

In today’s interrelated world, organizational relationships have become complex and often confusing. Fundamentally, executives, managers, and civil servants who’ve been managing in traditional hierarchical command and control companies are befuddled when given an assignment that requires them to develop relationships outside their span of control. The synergy they seek from the relationship remains elusive; cultural differences become insurmountable obstacles; project management turns into problem management; and the bureaucracies of the two parent organizations can become a quagmire of politics.

Secrets of Synergy

Not every complex organizational relationship experiences these impasses.

“I am amazed how well our two companies are working together. We are actually ahead of schedule, and have had relatively few difficulties;” was the delighted comment from the alliance manager of a strategic sourcing venture consisting of a European food service company and an American partner.

“After only 6 weeks of working together, it’s hard to tell the difference between the employees of their company and ours;” explained the director of an international mining company, commenting on his joint venture with an electronics firm.

“I’ve forged alliances internally with our different departments and locations, with our work force, with our suppliers, and with our best customers. It’s enabled us to put new programs into place rapidly. Our sales and profits have increased over 150%,” was the proud statement of a Canadian manufacturer.

These collaborative managers achieved success because they insisted that their joint teams spend ample time understanding the unique aspects of strategic relationships, building cross-cultural

teamwork, and establishing processes and skills to access and embrace the unique value of their joint vision and their partner's unique strength.

Experience has proven that there are invaluable beliefs and skills which are often overlooked that enable collaborative managers to produce high performance results: skills at managing differences, breakthroughs, speed, and transformation.

The Value of Differences

The fundamental reason why teams or alliances are formed is to access a capability within other people, groups, or organizations, thus finding the magical synergy, the 1+1=3. However, this means capturing the value of differences.

Lying within these inherent differences is the promise of the new team to create bold new futures, or conversely, to implode upon itself as differences turn destructive. Unfortunately, for all-too-many organizations, differences become corrosive, actions become angry, self-protection arises from distrust, and polarization rigidifies points of view. Some people turn to lawyers to generate reams of legal documents to create surrogate contractual trust. Others stand their ground more firmly, often with dire consequences – liberals versus conservatives, Protestants versus Catholics, Muslims versus Jews, capitalism versus communism, blacks versus whites – and the list goes on. Seemingly, the difficulty in managing differences is a relationship problem has gone on since the beginning of recorded time. The Bible is filled with these conflicts, Chinese history records similar conflicts, and even the wisdom of Socrates and Plato did not diminish the carnage.

Traditional approaches to managing cultural differences have focused on becoming sensitive to differences, cross-cultural training, understanding linguistic nuances, and acculturation. While these methods have their worth, a number of very essential approaches are often overlooked that distinguish successful organizational relationships (each element will be explored in detail in the following pages):

- Power of Shared Vision
- Synergy of Compatible Differences
- Commitment to Mutual Benefit
- Trust Building & Integrity
- Commitments & Camaraderie
- Sharing Expands Possibilities
- Conflict Transcendence
- Turning Breakdowns into Breakthroughs
- Transformational Flexibility

The Power of Shared Vision

The universal vitality of focusing on a powerful common vision, backed up by a dynamic and inspiring value proposition that speaks to the customer shows no cultural boundaries.

For example, take this typical vision for a business:

“We will be the leaders in our industry.”

It presents a “vision vacuum” by saying nothing, containing no commitments, and inspiring neither the organization’s stakeholders nor its customers nor its suppliers. Devoid of a powerful vision, everything defaults to politics, manifesting as cultural differences, which then divide the stakeholders against themselves.

As the old adage from Alice in Wonderland states: *“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will get you there.”* And that road will be fraught with in-fighting, subversion, despair, and confusion, all of which will ultimately lead to the ruin of the alliance.

Contrast the weakness of a faulty vision with the motivational force of a more commanding perspective:

“Our team will create 10 new innovations each year that will reduce the costs to our customers by 25%, while accelerating their throughput by 50%.”

By having a powerful central vision and value proposition such as this, partners focus differences on how to achieve the joint goal, rather than arguing amongst themselves as to whose way is the “right way.” A shared vision helps ensure synchronicity.

Powerful visions are all founded on belief in the ability to discover the unknown, accomplish the seemingly impossible, and overcome the apparently unattainable.

Therefore, strong leadership must be present to build such a vision and to unify and align the team’s differences for a common purpose.

Synergy of Compatible Differences

Synergy does not just occur as a natural byproduct of a relationship nor from a tough legal agreement, nor by dint of a dream.

Rather, it must be designed with architectural aplomb. But more, synergy must be activated by a powerful set of actions founded upon the understanding of how differentials produce the 1+1=3 effect.

“If two people in the same room think alike, one is unnecessary;” commented the philosopher Ernest Holmes.

The eminent psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung foresaw the potential of relationships when he said: *“The greater the contrast, the greater the potential. Great energy only comes from a correspondingly great tension between opposites.”*

Joel Barker, in his groundbreaking work on paradigms, recognized that new paradigms originate from outsiders who think differently, not from insiders who see their world from an old and tired perspective.

Each of these men understood the profound impact differences can have on the co-creation of bold new futures.

Invariably, however, ethnocentric or business culture attempts to enforce its mighty and frequently destructive hand. Some team members may begin by making judgments regarding the other side's culture, branding it as strange, wrong, inefficient, bad, or unproductive. As soon as this begins, fear, uncertainty, doubt, and distrust begin to fester, and then the alliance begins to unravel. This calls for strong action.

Adept relationship managers, leveraging the vision for the alliance, will call for creating a "synergy of compatible differences" in which differences are respected as source of innovation, cherished for their ability to break paradigms, and expected to produce creative solutions. The manager's ability to create this new "super-ordinate" culture within the organization enables the relationship to produce at higher performance levels than either individual member can achieve alone.

Because complex organizational relationships cannot be commanded, the mechanisms for leadership and control are dramatically different compared with most conventional hierarchies. Great relationship managers tend to be "integrators," possessing outstanding skills in bridging differences through their ability to translate across cultural boundaries. The greater the differential between cultures, the greater the need for highly skilled integrators.

Often the effective integrator will develop principles and values for the alliance that forge unity of vision and purpose. Integrators empower those around them by recognizing that "people support what they help create." Thus, they use techniques to unify alliance members, rather than divide them, to bring out the best in others.

Synchronicity

Anyone who has traveled to Switzerland will notice immediately that Swiss churches are different from other churches in other lands. What's different? A clock is imbedded in every

~ EXAMPLE ~

Baseball's Famed Double Play

Infielders executing a "double play" is a perfect example of synergy and synchronicity. All players have the same shared vision and guiding principles, innate trust in their teammates, commitment to precision of execution, and very clear roles and responsibilities.

Timing is essential. A split second spent to "think about the play" is enough to ensure failure.

Without deep trust in the other player's competence, understanding of the big picture, and cherishing of the different skills, the double play cannot be executed.

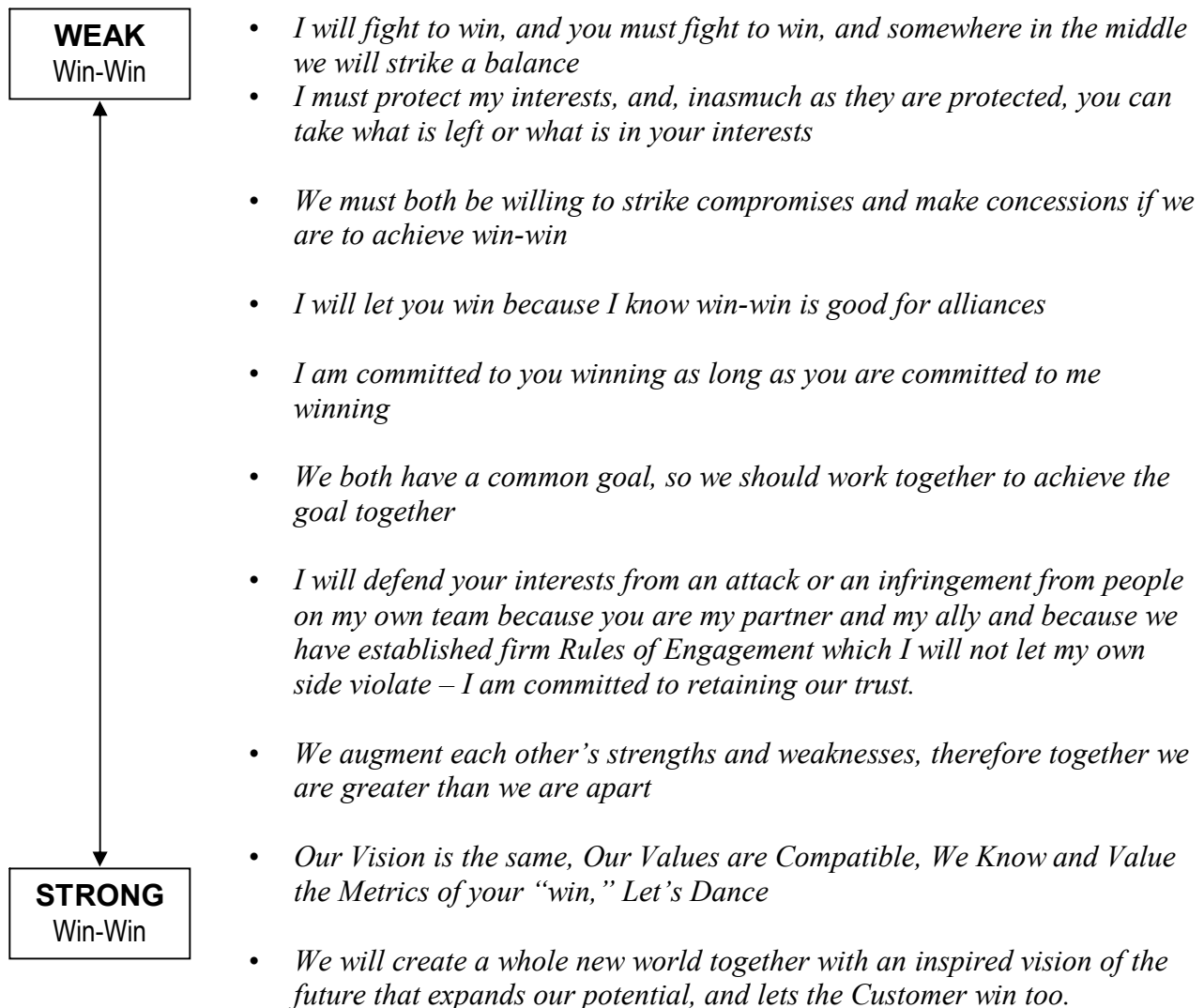
Every sport – hockey, basketball, football, soccer – has its parallel example.

steeply. Why? To keep the culture synchronized. The importance of synchronicity is that it enables coordination, encourages cooperation, and stimulates co-creation.

According to historical lesson, Switzerland should never exist. A country made up of German, French, and Italian cultures would ordinarily tear itself up. But, though not the sole reason, synchronicity contributes enormously to synergy.

Commitment to Mutual Benefit

Win-Win is the oft-trumpeted rallying call for teams and alliances. But win-win can mean very different things to different people. Consider the striking difference between these statements, all of which represent win-win:



For synergy to manifest itself, the strategic relationship must be championed by people willing to make strong commitments to a powerful win-win.

Trust Building & Integrity

Ask any alliance manager about the value of trust in a relationship, and they will wax eloquently about its impact on success. Without trust, strategic relationships fail, period. Trust is the foundation of all cooperative enterprise.

Trust is the hallmark of the personal relationships between the people who constitute the team. Without this trust, no legal agreement, no strategy, no structure, and no process can achieve its objectives. These personal trusting relationships distinguish great team leaders from their transactional cousins who bring the fool's golden rule into the relationship:

"He who has the Gold: Rules."

The best strategic relationships tend to use three metallic rules:

Golden Rule: *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."*

Silver Rule: *"At least do for yourself what you would do for others."*

Iron Rule: *"Don't do for others what they can do for themselves."*

Trust is the glue that binds personal relationships and the grease that prevents frictional differences from becoming fractious.

Trust and Integrity are the threads of the complex relational fabric. Integrity is more than just being honest or trustworthy. Integrity means being true to oneself, to one's deepest values; and the benefits are ultimately both a divine blessing and a liberating freedom.

"Integrity resides in the ability to constitute yourself as your word. As such it is a home, an anchor, a self-generated and continuing commitment to honor your word -- despite contrary thoughts and feelings if need be. It is a consistency of being, speaking and acting that shapes who you are -- to yourself and to others."

Anonymous

Integrity becomes a divine gift by enabling us to touch the deepest yearnings of others around us, thus creating a new set of possibilities filled with hope and inspiration. Integrity is thus expansive, allowing us to become more than ourselves, to create with others, to empower others.

For Gerry Dehkes, an alliance champion at Telcordia,

"Integrity includes setting expectations and consistently meeting them. Doing both is important. Making sure that your counterparts will know (and be able to trust) that you will act in a certain way in a given situation. Then meet or beat that expectation consistently. This extends beyond the individual to the rest of the people in the alliance"

partners organizations. Or better, in an old Minnesota expression; 'Underpromise. Over Deliver.' View problems or barriers, especially early on, as opportunities to show your trustworthiness, meeting the expectations you've set with your partners. These have strong impact beyond the decision of the moment. They engender trust that later on you will indeed act that way, thus inviting reciprocal actions."

Integrity marvelously liberates us to live our relationships forward into the future, enabling us to experience the present moment cleanly and without fear that our past will undermine us, corrode our vision, and erode our energy.

The lack of integrity inevitably forces one to look back over one's shoulder, haunted by a past filled with historic baggage which will harbor tomorrow's illness, or threaten to destroy one's false illusions that were invented to disguise the sordid realities of a disingenuous life.

In a fast moving world, trust and integrity thus spawn a massive competitive advantage, because together they enable the teams to make rapid decisions without the need for a legal contract every time someone tries to make a decision. What's more, trust and integrity enhance creativity, build teamwork, reduce unnecessary transactional costs (such as memos to protect oneself), and make the relationship more fun, thereby building human energy.

Commitment & Camaraderie

Building trust in a relationship comes not from golf games and dining together. It's built in the heart, and on the field of deeds; it's held in the commitment to transform values and beliefs into concrete actions, it's founded on the commitments to the integrity of one's word.

Trust and Integrity are but hollow concepts until vigorous commitments are put into place. For it is with commitment we transform promise into reality by words that reflect intentions, and actions which speak louder than words. Commitment is making the time when there is none; the daily triumph of vision over skepticism, of conviction over fear, of cohesiveness in the face of adversity.

Commitment is the willingness to take risks, even when past experience calls for caution. Commitment is crossing the chasm of fear and danger to meet the needs and hopes of your partner. Commitment is the willingness to look from the past into future possibilities; the willingness to move enough to release anger and hurt to enable our rising to a higher level, seeking to turn breakdowns into breakthroughs.

Commitment is the power to transform the reality of relationships. Commitment is the willingness to take the leap of faith when there is little justifying evidence, because one believes in the other's values and integrity.

Relationship leaders always remark that they are accused of being traitors to own organizations when they stand tall and strong for their alliance partners. Brian Ferrar, alliance champion at HP-Compaq recognizes how this bonding impacts the relationship between champions:

“An alliance manager and his counterpart at the partner company are often closer than each may be to many of their co-workers because of the trust it takes to form the alliance.”

However, this bonding across organizational boundaries can be quite disconcerting to many insiders who see this as a serious breach of loyalty. It is from this loyalty, commitment, and integrity that relationship managers build a camaraderie that lasts for years.

Sharing Expands Possibilities

For a moment, consider the interconnection between synergy and sharing. Synergy’s goal is to attain the 1+1=3 proposition. The only way to attain such gain is through co-creative sharing. Alliances are built on the fundamental premise that sharing of risks and resources will expand the possibilities and rewards available to all.

Sadly, in a world where certain resources may have been scarce, hoarding is a common practice, based on the belief that hoarding will control resources, thereby maximizing returns.

One must distinguish between *expendable* resources that disappear upon sale or consumption (such as oil, food, minerals, etc) and *expandable* resources that multiply the more they are used (such as creativity, cooperation, and teamwork).

Expendable resources are depleted and decrease upon usage. Expandable resources regenerate and increase when used.

For example, software is an expandable resource. Using it daily does not diminish its size or impact. To the contrary, using software creates more value every time it is used -- therefore it expands. It is best used when shared, transferred and transmitted. Using this resource brings it to life. Capturing the learning and sharing the knowledge generated by software only makes it more valuable, reaching more people, and generating more future possibilities.

Unlike expendables, which adhere to the universal price laws of supply and demand, expandables are not limited by supply, and demand does not increase their price, but does increase their value.

We must be able to distinguish between expendables and expandables when negotiating any strategic relationship. To treat each with the same principles limits possibilities of expanding the realm of the partnership. This type of thinking is often reflected in contracts for intellectual property, where negotiators tussle for months and even years over ownership rights. Their hoarding mentality blocks them from realizing that, if sharing of intellectual property rights occurred, both sides would create more new ideas and command a better mutual competitive advantage.

The economic Laws of Expendables run counter to the Laws of Expandables, but both are true and both mutually exist in our world. The problem is that miserly minds can't acknowledge the latter.

Accessing the expansive possibility of sharing begins with the mutual belief that “the more you give, the more you’re going to get.” When both partners hold this belief, it manifests. The general rule for the Law of Expandables is

Sharing Expands, Hording Contracts

Roy Rogers, commenting on his long marriage to Dale Evans, remarked that a great marriage is not a 50-50 arrangement. Both partners have to give at least 100%. Rogers said both Dale and he were always willing to go beyond: giving 120%. The Law of Expandables creates its own “regenerative energy,” this is what we call “synergy.”

Ask yourself the question: “What kind of relationship will emerge if sharing is not a fundamental value?” If the answer is filled with fear, distrust, or uncommitted action, the relationship will bear shrunken and shriveled fruit.

Conflict Transcendence

Whenever disagreement arises (and it will, for wherever there is change, there will be disagreement and conflict), great alliance practitioners are careful to focus on ideas and issues, steering clear of ego entrapment games, such as “who's right or wrong,” or “what's good or bad” that will rapidly descend into the pits of defensive self-righteousness and intractable conflict.

Conflict is the inevitable by-product of all change, and any proposition of new ideas will generate some amount of conflict. The objective is to prevent the conflict from degenerating into blind fear and inflexible rigidity. As one champion in our focus groups articulated it:

“Without conflict there will probably be no buy-in. I just have to be careful I do not take conflict personally as an attack on myself. Conflict is just a tool to get people talking and debating an issue from one side or another. It promotes the kind of understanding necessary to be successful in this business.”

Most organizational relationships exist in a world of constant flux, and therefore need frequent and continual adjustment. If those responsible for the alliance use win-lose negotiating techniques, always angling for self-interested advantage, then each side will lose synergy potential. But worse, this approach will then generate conflict, which will soon become unmanageable as trust and commitment rapidly evaporate in an enflamed atmosphere of fear and protection.

Turning Breakdowns into Breakthroughs

The Co-Creative Spirit has an internal compass that points to synergy in lieu of conflict. This does not mean disagreements and breakdowns do not occur. But rather that these circumstances

are opportunities for improvement, situations for turning breakdowns into breakthrough, conditions for shifting to higher orders of thinking.

Disagreement does not naturally gravitate to conflict, but becomes a transcendent experience to turn the passion of argument into the passion of creation.

Instead of taking “positions” on issues – a certain sign that conflict is brewing – the effective leader seeks to find mutual interest, joint advantage, shared vision, common values, and combined strength to stake out a new future and a shift in thinking.

This leader will not be a great compromiser between the diverse elements, however, unless every other avenue has been explored. A compromise is usually seen as a poor second choice, the forsaking of a dream. Forging a new unity from seemingly diverse values and thinking will be the relationship champion’s first choice. This unity becomes a new order of interaction, better than the original, thereby creating a *super-ordinate* culture for the alliance.

Negotiating styles that are overly legalistic, win-lose, or adversarial in any way will be highly detrimental to the overall health of the alliance in an environment of frequent repositioning.

Transformational Flexibility

In a fast moving, rapidly changing world, many strategic driving forces will be in flux -- technology is changing; customer tastes are changing; power positions are changing; priorities are changing. The underlying forces that may have been the fundamental reason the strategic relationship was formed may be in a constant state of flux, serving as a major destabilizing factor, like a rogue wave trying to capsize a boat. Thus, strategic relationships are in constant need of transformation.

But bull-headed managers are quickly trapped in untenable positions by dramatic shifts in strategic driving forces. In an effort to maintain trust by establishing predictability, efforts to justify their position by self-effacing comments like: “at least you know where I stand, therefore you can trust me,” are met with increasingly incredulous stares. As the Bible says, when the blind lead the blind, both end up in a ditch.

Here it’s important to make a critical distinction between ethics/values and direction in any strategic relationship. Ethics are one of the only (if not the only) things that remains unchanged over the course of a strategic relationship. Ethics is like an anchor to windward, providing a firm grounding for the relationship. On the other hand, direction may change strategic winds change, more adversarial conditions emerge, or more information is known. For example, in the very important relationship between a doctor and their patient, the doctor’s ethics have been proscribed two thousand years ago with the Hippocratic Oath, but the doctors treatment program must change as new lab reports provide different insights, tissue generation or degeneration occurs, etc.

Relationship managers must be monitoring the shifts in the strategic environment regularly, and repositioning the membership to align with these shifts.

Because complex organizational relationships must transform themselves frequently or lose their mission and purpose, leaders must establish a culture of visioning, breakthroughs, and co-creation as a foundation for their renegotiations. As one telecommunications executive said of his alliance in Poland, *“No one knows what the future will look like. But if we don’t talk about it, we will end up someplace else.”*

Flexibility is essential to making relationships work over the long haul, because benefits to each party are seldom equal at any one point in time. Each partner can expect to see benefits unequal for short periods of time, but without flexibility to re-write an agreement, failure is lurking.

For example, in the alliance between British Airways and USAir, both airlines gained significant new passengers and made commensurate investment. However the benefits eventually saw BA gaining over a 100% increase in revenues, while struggling USAir gained only 40%. This situation called for a readjustment of the division of profits, which, when it did not occur, created acrimony and eventual dissolution of the alliance. BA’s later alliance with American Airlines embraced a distribution of revenues based on passengers attributable to the alliance.

What is missing from most teams, alliances, and partnerships is a clear definition of the spirit that bonds people and organizations together, and gives them the flexibility to make adjustments as the world around them changes. This flexibility and agility can never be codified in a legal contract. In fact, successful alliance managers proclaim that if they have to look at the legal contract, the alliance has failed. Strategic relationships exist not the contract but in the soul and spirit of those who create and manage it. Successful synergistic relationships are best codified by a co-created set of mutually beneficial operating principles or rules engagement than by a legalistic, trust destroying contract.

Fear of Betrayal

This noble quest for synergy is, however, thwarted all-too-often by betrayal, or even just the fear of betrayal, which is one of our deepest fears, most tormented anxieties, and horribly painful lessons.

To attain synergy, it’s essential to understand its polar opposite – the Fear of Betrayal. For it is the juxtaposing of these two themes that has created on the one hand: wars, divorce, political upheaval, and tyranny, and on the other hand: civilization, technological innovation, institutions of commerce, healing, and learning, and even transcendental glory.

The interplay between the “Quest for Synergy” and the “Fear of Betrayal” is so profoundly engrained in our society’s institutions as to be nearly invisible. To discover its roots, however, one needs only to examine the archetypal sources that are so imbedded and intertwined in our society. Examining the historical records will cast great light on early civilization’s yearning to attain the Quest and battle the Fear.

The Old Testament's Book of Genesis, chronicling the origins of Judaism, starts with God creating a synergistic universe, then creating a synergistic union with Adam, Eve, and God in the Garden of Eden. Then: the betrayal. Eve and Adam are cast out of the garden for betraying God's commandments. The source of the betrayal is no less than Satan. Later, Cain betrays Able by murdering him. Abraham, in synergistic brotherhood, rescues Lot from those betraying spirits in Sodom and Gomorrah.

The most horrible betrayal occurred in heaven itself when Lucifer, the Son of the Dawn, betrayed God, who was forsaken not only by Lucifer, but also by a third of all the angels in heaven. (Esek 28) Even God did not have the power to prevent betrayal. In the New Testament, Christ is betrayed by Judas, resulting in a crucifixion. Even the doubts of Thomas were considered a minor form of betrayal.

In ancient Greece, wise Socrates was betrayed by his own Athenian citizens. He drank hemlock in prison before he could be executed. Homer wrote of the abduction of Helen as the Trojans betrayed their alliance with the Greeks. In the classic Roman betrayal, Caesar was assassinated by Brutus. Shakespeare capitalized on betrayal in some of the most memorable literature in the English Language, embodied in Hamlet, Macbeth, and Julius Caesar.

Rape, incest, molestation by clergy, murder, and theft (particularly in one's home) are all examples of what we consider the ultimate forms of betrayal. These sins are so emotionally laden because they violate the very trust and belief we have in our most divine yearning – the Quest for Synergy.

Sadly, in the attempt to protect ourselves from our Fear of Betrayal, we have created a legion of laws, new fears, and protectionist policies that draws our society farther from the synergy. No lawyer can create a legal document protecting us from betrayal, and neither can a family or friendship protect us. Only a powerful commitment to honor, a mutual standard of win-win, and an unwavering standard of integrity can protect oneself against betray and its ancillary: the fear of betrayal. To often the fear of betrayal is in and of itself enough to trigger protectionist behavior that, in turn triggers the betrayal fears in others, thus generating a vicious circle of more fear, more distrust, and more betrayal.

Knights of the Round Table, Betrayal, and the Mordred Factor

Perhaps no story imbedded in our collective psyche could be as compelling as the medieval legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.¹ As the legend has evolved, it may be the ultimate story of the Quest for Synergy and the Tragedy of Betrayal. King Arthur dreamed of Round Table of honorable and chivalrous knights who, together united in a common vision and ideal, would protect their kingdom, prosper, and flourish. Joy would prevail throughout the land.

¹ The power of the Camelot story is the compelling desire for unity, friendship, happiness, trust, and release from fear – the essence of synergy. The story is powerful not because it is legend, but because it touches in each of us the yearning for a world that lets each of us be gallant, elegant, committed, and filled with team and community spirit. The Round Table symbolism appears in numerous cultures ; in the Oriental culture, it 's the Yin-Yang symbol.

However, in a series of traumatic betrayals, Lancelot has an affair with Guinevere, destroying the beauty and bliss of most passionate of trios. Then, the penultimate betrayal is revealed with the unkindly arrival of Mordred,² who is Arthur's illegitimate son (and thus heir to the throne) into the court of Camelot.

Born of a deception seduction by the treacherous witch Morguise,³

Mordred is the classic conniver, a no-holds-barred schemer whose only intent is to relentlessly destroy the trusting relationships among the Knights of the Round Table. Playing one off against the other, setting each out to destroy the values and ideals that created Camelot's synergy, Mordred systematically undermines everything that Arthur dreamed or created. Portraying himself as a realist who can act appropriately in the arena of *real politic*, Mordred, in the most sinister of plots, excommunicates nearly all of the knights, who, now marginalized, ignominiously join forces to become Arthur's enemies and overthrow Camelot, destroying the ever-present and forever lingering dream of synergy.

Despite Arthur's passionate but unrequited hope that Mordred might have a spark of goodness in him, Mordred persists on his destructive path. Lancelot's offer to thrust an iron spike through Mordred's heart is rejected by Arthur, for whom hope for man's salvation reigns eternal. Arthur remains the dreamer, the idealist, and the failure, for there is neither hope nor salvation for Mordred – only death or isolated incarceration (like Napoleon's exile to St. Helen's island) is the only workable fate.

Like the allegory of the frog carrying the scorpion across the river, then being stung to death by the unappreciative passenger who says to the dying frog "it's in my nature," there is no alternative to dealing with a Mordred than to cut him out like a cancerous tumor.

Mordred is the embodiment of the sinister. His evil essences is destructive, not through direct aggression and attack, but by undermining, by indirection, by manipulative abuse to cause others to do his wicked bidding, by guise and guile.

It is Mordred's characterization as a person whose values are the archetypical antithesis to the Arthurian Quest for Synergy that we term *the Mordred Factor*. Not only do these people have neither the desire nor ability to collaborate, synergize, and synchronize, but go to the opposite extreme, and purposefully (either intentionally or unintentionally) destroy synergy, teamwork, co-creativity, and spiritual community. When done unintentionally, it usually takes a variety of forms, such as selfishness or insecurity, and manifests as: blame, criticism, attack, negativity, complain, or fault finding. When done intentionally, the result is usually far more insidious, destructive, and often horrifying. Today's leaders are faced with removing Mordreds.

The Machiavelli Maneuver

To reveal and counter the intentional Mordred, which seemed quite prolific during the middle ages, a particularly unique characterization emerged during the Renaissance.

² Mordred is most likely a combination of the French word *morte* (as in mortician) for death, and old English word *draden*, meaning terror or fear, from which the current word *dread* is derived.)

³ Note the close connection to the word *morgue*: *a tomb (womb?) of death*

As a prelude and warning to the emerging Renaissance, Niccolo Machiavelli⁴ wrote his classic tales: *The Prince* and *Discourses*, as a handbook for power and control. Machiavelli, a student of *real politic*, details the use of initiating manipulative techniques to offset, counter-balance, overthrow, or combat others engaged in Mordred like activities. The age of intrigue was formalized, making betrayal, conniving, conspiracy, and scheming its own art form.

Machiavelli's Prince is not strictly evil, he is a fox. And a fox he must be in a world of Mordreds, where there may be limited options to slay the dragon Mordred. Cunning was a requisite skill in a kingdom well populated with Mordreds.

Shakespeare took Machiavelli to the theatre. Shakespearian tragedy is the personification of betrayal. In *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* the audience is bedazzled by a string of multiple betrayals that enfolds us in the tragedy of a denied dream of collaboration, honor and joy. *Julius Caesar* pits the betrayals by the conniving Cassius and the murderous Brutus against the vision of patriotism and honor of Mark Antony. Cassius observes to Brutus of the nature of this evil:

Men at some time are masters of their fates:
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves....
How many ages hence
shall this ... be acted o'er,
in states unborn and accents yet unknown!..

Sadly, in each tragedy Shakespeare bequeaths us with an epic struggle embracing no classic heroes, no optimism for defeating Mordred nor disarming Machiavelli, leaving posterity with a helpless archetypal organizational role model. The modern Hamlet, left bedeviled by treachery, cunning, and manipulation, has had few tools or strategies to create a sustainable Camelot.

Countering Mordred & Machiavelli

In our world of emerging value networks, alliances, and cross functional teams, it is essential for every leader to be cautious and observant regarding the potential Mordred on the team. As one respected leader told me recently:

“I’m leaving my organization to join another. My boss hired a person for our team who has been so disruptive that now everyone is being played off against the other. I spend all my time now worrying about who is going to put a knife in my back. I used to be a high flyer. Unless I leave I’ll have no future.”

Another executive lamented about her subordinates:

“I hired the most qualified people I could afford. But they are always breaking down, working for their own self interest. There is no teamwork, no synergy, and no synchronicity. We don’t coordinate well. No amount of team building seems to work.”

⁴ It’s worthwhile to note the important distinction between Mordred and Machiavelli. The former was insidious, self-centered, and evil; the latter amoral and practical almost to a fault.

Unknowingly, she made the mistake of hiring her team based on competence, not character,⁵ resulting in a majority of people being or becoming “Marginal Mordreds.”

How an organization creates a culture of innovation and collaboration is critical in either stimulating or repressing the Marginal Mordred and the Machiavelli Maneuver. As I was editing this piece, the phone rang. It was a senior manager from a large corporation who said with a sigh:

“There is no real innovation here and little collaboration. We all have a fear of failure because people are fired if they fail. If we do make a mistake, we are criticized in front of others. So no one takes any risks. We talk of innovation, but we don’t walk it. No one collaborates unless someone else is willing to take the risk and responsibility if something doesn’t work out. When we try to work in alliance with other companies, there’s an attitude that our products are always better, and theirs are junk. We see only a very limited set of options. If someone does have something good, our approach is arrogant: ‘We’ll just buy them.’ When we do, we kill all their innovation.”

This was said by a man of courage and vision who had been struggling for years to rally his small team against the overwhelming power of an antithetical culture. Yet we cannot expect those of vision and courage to act forever like fools. Unless new leadership is brought in, or alternatively, those of courage join forces as a “band of brothers,” each of the courageous visionaries will be picked off, one-by-one, or be relegated to live a sorry life of disillusionment and despair.

Role of Inspired Leadership

Leaders play an enormous role in determining attitudes and behavior.

Unknowingly, many leaders unintentionally betray their subordinate’s expectations for being acknowledged and rewarded for excellent work, innovative thinking, and willingness to take risks for the greater good of the organization. When these expectations are unfulfilled, their morale takes a long, low road to disappointment and despair. The climate of excitement and innovation yields to an attitude of complaint, blame, and resentment. It is in this swamp of despair the marginal Mordred breeds like a mosquito.

If the ghost of Mordred and Machiavelli are prolific in your organization, look to the top where their spirit may reside. And also look within to see if you are trapped in a culture of intrigue, innuendo, and doubt in which you’ve become one of the principal or supporting actors.

Like the smoker who gets a momentary nicotine high, leaders who feast on a diet cynicism, criticism, blame, negativity, and rule by fear may get an emotional power-high, but in the long run, with each passing day, sustainable energy is drained from the organization on its slow decline to death. Work then becomes nothing more than a bitter-sweet travail with neither victory nor valor, honor nor heroics.

⁵ Japanese corporations are more skilled at getting teamwork to prevail. They hire on the basis of character weighing in at 80% of the person’s value, and competence at 20%. American companies typically base their decision on just the opposite proportion.

Mastery as Relationship Architects

Seldom does synergy happen by accident. It manifests because people believe it is possible; it is a self-fulfilling prophesy.

To those who build strategic relationships, our work is not just a business profession, but a mission with its roots solidly set in the "architecture of cooperation."

Our mission is to transcend divergent points of view, thus co-generating bold new futures where differences become the ever-renewable source of creative energy, the essence of innovation, the dynamism of new possibilities. Ours is a noble endeavor -- designing the synergy of compatible differences. Daily we must use honor and integrity to build the trust that is essential to all our relationships.

Held within the seed of the architecture of cooperation is the power to let us bring a new insight, a new pathway, a new hope, a new spirit, and a new power to our world.

Each day, when we use or invent a strategic relationship, we are contributing to the creation of that higher order of experience and action that makes our workplace a better place to live. Daily we are honing the skills and transmitting the abilities and multiplying the possibilities to spawn a better world around us. As we expand our capabilities in teams and alliances, we can use these proficiencies in a multitude of applications -- better marriages, better teams, better families, and better communities.

In the large span of things, step by step, relationship by relationship, we will have created a better world for all of us.