

On People, Power, Partnerships, Futures and Change - August 2020

Over the past 4 months, like everyone else, [GMI](#) adapted to new practical but also social and emotional realities. Yet our work and relationships have remained as meaningful as ever and, with even greater relevance than before, we connect the personal and professional, and move between system and self. With various clients and collaborators, we have engaged on '[people](#)', '[partnerships](#)' and '[power](#)', on '[emerging future\(s\)](#)' and on '[change management](#)'. And yes, on [COVID-19](#) and its socio-economic impacts as well.

People

['She Leads Change'](#) is a network of mostly (but not only) women that offers peer learning and courage for change makers. Smruti has become increasingly engaged with it and is now one of the coaches. During the lockdowns in many European countries, one coach at the start of every day, led a 15 mins, on-line, '[cup of calm](#)' session. In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests and discussions on racism and colonialism in the aid sector she, with other members of the network, are also exploring how to hold a safe space to have authentic conversations on '[inclusion and diversity](#)', without it becoming a tick box approach.

We joined in on-line sessions by Sujith Ravindran and Briony Vanden Bussche on finding, or perhaps better, *allowing* 'abundance' in our lives: being locked down is a good opportunity to reflect on how we are in ourselves and whether we are open to gifts of the unexpected in life.

"Everything that manifests around you is an echo of your inner state. You are the choice maker of your inner state"

The webinars of Patrick Lescioni and his Table Group were another source of energy and inspiration. A key reference on what makes teams (dys)functional, Patrick and his colleagues argue convincingly for intentional stronger '[personalisation](#)' in times of physical distancing – also in the work sphere.

"Leaders now need to be exceedingly human. People don't trust you if you are not vulnerable."

"The most resilient companies are the ones that focus on organisational health. The health of an organisation (in the sense of a positive atmosphere) maximises its intelligence. It's not a side dish of the business."

Smruti continued working with two civil society organisations in Myanmar on developing a safeguarding culture, to prevent harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. Products generated from this are Guidelines for Developing Conscious Culture of Safeguarding and a checklist on '[Safeguarding as a resource for local and national CSOs during Covid- 19 response](#)', plus online workshops on PSEA and on Complaints and Response Mechanisms. She is also working with several private security companies in other countries, reviewing their PSEA policies and procedures. And continues her involvement with the Inter Agency Steering Committee (IASC) results group 2, as an expert on '[accountability to affected populations](#)' and '[prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse](#)'.

Experience has shown that the mainstream approach of intensifying policies and procedures aiming at zero tolerance is necessary but not sufficient. GMI believes creating a *conscious culture* which is rooted in respectful and compassionate attitudes and behaviours towards each other and other stakeholders, and agreeing on team standards, is vital. It is a more inspiring and more positive approach and promotes more proactive and collective responsibility. Smruti uses her [Being at Full Potential Framework](#) for this..

Together with Harmen Van Dijk, another Being at Full Potential coach, Smruti for several weeks has worked with the senior management team of a Philippines organisation, on *wellbeing*. We discovered it worked very well on-line and was so well received that more staff are asking to be included. A fuller programme of support to the teams to achieve their full potential, complemented by individual coaching, is now being designed as further on-line sessions. She also continued providing mentoring

support to local leaders in other countries. Together with others, we are turning this into a regular mentoring programme.

Partnerships

A global alliance of some 35 organisations working on the medical but also social, economic and political dimensions of HIV/AIDS, is evolving. Following its articulation of a new global strategy in early 2019, *changes were required in the partnerships' constellation*. This touched on many sensitivities: therefore, the *how of the change process* is as important as the what. For the past year, Koenraad has been accompanying the process as advisor, resource person and occasional facilitator. The intent is to share power and accept distributed leadership. Recently, this resulted in a concept of a structure for more collective leadership of the alliance, provisionally named a '*Partnership Council*'. The beauty lies in the willingness and ability to proceed in a process-manner, resisting the temptation to quickly fix something into a detailed model. That is how innovation works: prototype something, start testing it, then adapt, correct and improve based on intentional learning.

Elsewhere, Koenraad is recommending to the Board of a Foundation that makes grants, in the first place to organisations which, after accreditation, become 'partners', to reflect whether it needs a '*partnership strategy*' or not, and if yes what that would look like. The Foundation wants to offer *more than money* and should expect more from its 'partners' than requests for money.

Power and partnership

On behalf of a German consortium, GMI is currently working with national researchers (Hadeel, Sai, Teshome, Guhad, Andrés, Abdul Latif, Qadeer, Eddy, Symphorien, and Chasan) in 9 countries, ranging from Colombia to Myanmar, inquiring into good practices of localisation. A policy and practice commitment of the international humanitarian sector, *localisation* seeks to reduce the dominance of international relief agencies over local and national actors, which they sometimes sideline and even undermine rather than support and reinforce. There are structural or system-wide factors that create situations that are not in line with a claimed 'solidarity' and 'assistance role'. Changing this is not just a matter of policies, practices and procedures. It requires more equitable partnerships and conscious attention to the *distribution of power, its use and possible abuse*. At a deeper level, mindsets at play: assumptions and beliefs about 'us' and 'them' that find expression in narratives and in behaviours that shape the relationships. Our holistic perspective allows us to see this at play from the international system, with its structural incentives and disincentives, to the self.

As one of the founders of [Alliance for Empowering Partnership](#), Smruti has been facilitating webinars with local responders to discuss progress on the progress on Grand Bargain commitments and develop advocacy papers. She is on the coordination group of [Charter 4 Change](#) and contributed to analysing the self-reports of signatory organisations, and drafting the annual C4C report.

Being *fit-for-partnering*, in collaborations where the contributions of each are valued, is not always part of the DNA or the business model of all organisations. It requires individual but also organisational competencies. GMI recently concluded its first on-line series of sessions on the *institutional implications and requirements to be 'a better partner'*. Two participating agencies approached us for further accompaniment. First conversations already proved stimulating for all.

COVID and its impacts

The COVID pandemic has brought a global disruption not seen perhaps since the end of the second World War. Its economic, social and political impacts are becoming increasingly clear. Working with a grant-making Foundation, Koenraad was involved in the review of proposals from various non-state social protection agencies in Switzerland. Each sought to provide rapid and practical assistance to various affected population groups. One surprise was the lack of established coordination structures among them and with the governmental authorities, though active coordination took place. A bigger surprise: the number of people living in socio-economically fragile situations in a country that we all imagine not only as stable and peaceful but also overall quite wealthy.

We remain also in continuous contact with leaders of civil society organisations in different countries, listening to their incredible efforts, often with minimal international assistance, to reduce socio-economic impacts of lockdowns on large numbers of people. With them, we have engaged with international policy makers in the aid sector, to be very flexible and supportive, and to take note of

the roles and responsibilities that local and national actors can take on, when the international assistance machinery is, quite literally, immobilised.

Future(s)

At the start of 2020, the world was already changing rapidly. Nobody knows yet in what ways the COVID pandemic will shape our near and medium-term futures. In some areas we may go back to before, in other changes will be deep and drastic. The level of unpredictability has increased exponentially in a truly short time. On a personal level, many of us must learn to be comfortable with this; organisationally, we must consider possible futures for which the assumption that modest changes to how we used to operate may not be good enough to survive and thrive. Both of us are now fellows of the [Interagency Research and Analysis Network](#). IARAN offers a robust foresighting method and practice. The results are possible scenarios, and the invitation for organisational and company leaders to take a longer view than the usual three to five years, consider quite different futures, and prepare not just for the most desired one. Methodologically possible, this is psychologically and organisationally difficult. More radical change is not comfortable, and organisational incentives and established metrics tend to support incremental rather than out-of-the-box changes. Strong skills in *managing change with people rather than onto people*, will be required.

Change management

The experience and research of management consultants, academic and other, has long documented what unhelpful approaches to change management are, and why. Yet they continue to be pursued, predictably leading to *'resistance to change'*, often for good reasons, not just for self-interest.

« If people don't weigh in on a decision, they don't buy into a decision.»

Koenraad ran a course, online and in French, on *fundamentals of change management*, for a group of students at the Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques in Paris. That revealed how much is possible on-line, but also what not. Small group conversations and case work in between sessions worked well – role plays, planned for the original 'live' version, seemed more complex.

Holistic perspective, integrated approach

What is the connecting theme and competency in all this? *People seeking and needing to work together*, in challenging situations, times of change and uncertain futures. The temptation, in societies where so much is framed in terms of a 'market', is to fall back on competition, leading to disengagement, loss of morale, distrust and conflict, and to use power for the purpose of *'power over'* rather than *'power with'*. That does not bring out the best in us and for our shared world. More positive approaches are possible, and GMI is committed to fostering those.

What and particularly *how* we behave in difficult circumstances is influenced by how we are in ourselves: our doing reflects our inner state, our being.

Our learning, our offer

We have learned that on-line collaboration, coaching, mentoring, facilitation and co-creation cannot fully substitute for real 'live' encounters, where we all pick up so many more clues, explicit and intended or not, that tell us about the environments in which developments take place. But we also experienced that so much more is possible on-line than we assumed. If we are willing to connect, beyond our formal public persona, across 'remoteness'.

We can offer you now, on line, individual mentoring; team coaching; support with creating a conscious culture of respectful interaction in the workplace (and beyond) based on shared responsibility; support to your efforts to strengthen partnering competencies at individual, operational and institutional level; advice and accompaniment with organisational development and -change and with multi-stakeholder processes; and – with the help of our IARAN colleagues- an opportunity to think through different possible futures and how to strategically prepare for them.

We are passionate about this and hope you are too. Why not have an exploratory conversation?
Contact us at

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