

**Organizational Metaphysics
Global Wisdom and the Audacity of Hope**

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The 21st century confronts society with challenges that will determine the future of humanity and the planet. Such challenges defy traditional analysis. Paralyzed by the inadequacy of our standard logic, we search for meaningful and effective understandings that can guide us—understandings that seem inherently true, right, and just. Wisdom, as the dictionary defines it, is that which “is true and right coupled with just judgment as to action.”¹ Few of us question the need for wisdom, yet to date academic scholarship has failed to address the role that wisdom plays in supporting organizational processes capable of addressing the world’s most demanding societal challenges.

This chapter explores the nature of pragmatic wisdom—wisdom that includes both profound understanding and action. Philosophically, therefore, it fits within the tradition of pragmatic metaphysics.² The approach is classically metaphysical in that it attempts to understand the complexity of reality while at the same time not being satisfied with simply understanding. The overarching focus is on action, that is, on those understandings that can be used to make a positive difference in the world.

This chapter uses the founding of a new international development initiative, Uniterra, to highlight the need for and influence of wisdom in organizational processes and outcomes. It follows the step-by-step process that Uniterra employed in designing and conducting its inaugural global meeting in Gaborone, Botswana. Uniterra exemplifies the role that multicultural wisdom can play in conceptualizing and forming novel organizational structures and processes that embody the qualities needed

for successful change efforts when confronting extremely challenging and complex issues. Uniterra's core structure and central process involve partnering—forming networks of nonhierarchical relationships. The chapter therefore investigates the wisdom needed to create and maintain various aspects of global partnering. Because the chapter focuses on pragmatic wisdom, it also explores the concepts of hope and courage, for without hope and courage, wisdom could never move beyond conceptualization to action.

The chapter is purposely organized and written in a style that differs from that of most scholarly articles. Beyond discussing wisdom in the context of a specific situation—that of the founding of Uniterra—the chapter attempts to offer possibilities to experience wisdom via a series of indigenous wisdom sayings (proverbs) from many of the world's more pragmatic wisdom traditions. So as not to interrupt the reader's appreciation of the wisdom sayings or reduce the meaning of such sayings strictly to their underlying logical constructs, the chapter uses endnotes rather than more traditional text references. Given the wide range of potentially unfamiliar cultural traditions included in the chapter, the endnotes offer more extensive background information than is generally included in more familiar data-focused articles.

The study of wisdom within scholarly management traditions is in its infancy. The issues addressed in this chapter have, as yet, few academic roots within organizational literature. It is hoped, therefore, that the chapter will lead to research into some of the more important wisdom-based organizational issues, including the following:

1. How do societal leaders obtain the wisdom and courage needed to address the world's gravest challenges?
2. How can global wisdom traditions support organizational actors and action that are true, just, and right?
3. How can multicultural wisdom traditions be used in complementary ways to support just organizational action?
4. In what ways can global partnering support wise action?
5. How can managers and leaders learn to combine their more traditional analytical approaches with wisdom?

Global Wisdom and the Audacity of Hope

*Our children may learn about the heroes of the past.
Our task is to make ourselves architects of the future.*

—Jomo Kenyatta, first president of Kenya³

In Pakistan, . . . members of a high-status tribe sexually abused one of Ms. Mukhtaran's brothers and then covered up the crime by falsely accusing him of having an affair with a high-status woman. The village's tribal council determined that the suitable punishment for the supposed affair was for high-status men to rape one of the boy's sisters, so the council sentenced Ms. Mukhtaran to be gang-raped.

As members of the high-status tribe danced in joy, four men stripped her naked and took turns raping her. Then they forced her to walk home naked in front of 300 villagers.

In Pakistan's conservative . . . society, Ms. Mukhtaran's duty was now clear: She was supposed to commit suicide. . . . Her older brother . . . explained, "A girl who has been raped has no honorable place in the village. Nobody respects the girl or her parents. There's a stigma, and the only way out is suicide."⁴

Does society need to change? Absolutely. Is the enormity of the task seemingly overwhelming? Absolutely. Is there reason for hope? Perhaps, but only when delivered with frame-breaking courage.⁵

Instead of killing herself, Ms. Mukhtaran testified against her attackers and propounded the shocking idea that the shame lies in raping rather than in being raped. The rapists are now on death row, and [Pakistan's] President . . . presented Ms. Mukhtaran with the equivalent of \$8,300 and ordered round-the-clock police protection.⁶

Is change possible? Absolutely. Is it probable? No. Moments of profound humanity, wisdom, and courage do occur yet often remain strangely invisible within the broader society, hidden beneath the negative barrage of more-of-the-same journalism and practiced cynicism. The very moments that keep hope alive often become clear only to those privileged few who are able to learn about the stories and to the fewer still who are able to transcend the world's all-too-common cynical appellations of naïveté and to see within each story its latent potential for transformative change.

Ms. Mukhtaran, who had never gone to school herself, used the money to build one school in the village for girls and another for boys because, she said, education is the best way to achieve social change. . . . She is now studying in its fourth-grade class. "Why should I have spent the money on myself?" she asked, adding, "This way the money is helping . . . all the children."⁷

Unquestionably, Ms. Mukhtaran's is a story of wisdom, generosity, and courage. Will the broader society change? Not necessarily. In Ms. Mukhtaran's case, the government has unfortunately chosen not to keep its promises.

*[Ms. Mukhtaran] . . . has had to buy food for the police who protect her as well as pay the school's operating expenses. . . . [Now she admits], "I've run out of money." Unless the schools can raise new funds, they may have to close.*⁸

Even with the wisest courageous action, is societal change ever easy or certain? No, never.

*Meanwhile, villagers say the relatives of the rapists are waiting for the police to leave and then will put Ms. Mukhtaran in her place by slaughtering her and her entire family.*⁹

Ms. Mukhtaran personifies the audacity of hope.¹⁰ Although life has not given her reasons to be hopeful, Ms. Mukhtaran's personal wisdom and courage have supported her in bringing hope to a seemingly hopeless situation. From Ms. Mukhtaran, we do not merely learn about a new elementary school and a potentially changed legal statute; we also learn about the power of wisdom, courage, and the audacity of hope to bring about profound societal change.

Global Wisdom and Societal Change

Wisdom begins in wonder.

—Socrates¹¹

Wisdom, according to the dictionary definition, is “knowledge of what is true and right coupled with just judgment as to action.”¹² Courage transforms wisdom—knowledge of what is true and right—into meaningful action. Hope inspires people to aspire toward dreams that others judge to be unrealistic—dreams that others are no longer capable of dreaming. Dee Hock, founder and chief executive officer (CEO) emeritus of VISA International, reminds us, “It is no failure to fall short of realizing all that we might dream—the failure is to fall short of dreaming all that we might realize.”¹³

Can society do better than it has done in the past? History, of course, would suggest that the answer is either *no* or, at best, *very unlikely*. Yet a multitude of global crises challenge us every day to transcend the confines of pessimistic precedent. Speaking on a much more prominent world stage than that of Ms. Mukhtaran, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright reminds us, “We have a responsibility in our time, as others have had in theirs, not to be prisoners of history, but to shape history.”¹⁴ We have a responsibility to reclaim the audacity of hope. How do we proceed?

Shaping History: The Audacity of Hope

Only a life lived for others is worth living.

—Albert Einstein¹⁵

“What you do in response to the ocean of suffering may seem insignificant, but it is very important you do it.”¹⁶ How do we find the wisdom, courage, and hope needed to respond to what India’s Mahatma Gandhi described so accurately as “the ocean of suffering”? What supports us in acting wisely and courageously when the odds we are given by rational analysis consistently demand that we quit—that we turn away from situations that are, or appear to be, beyond the reach of repair? Although there are many potential answers, one that is currently being tried is to create “a structure of hope” that systematically draws on the collective wisdom, courage, humanity, and dreams of people from throughout the world. To date, we have only the beginning of the story, but nonetheless, its beginning offers a noteworthy approach. The story, not altogether dissimilar from that of other international development efforts, tells of the birth of a global initiative that is committed to making a difference in the world. In this particular case, however, the founding organizations are consciously attempting to design a structure that can support the audacity of hope. In addition to supporting what they seek to achieve in the world, the structure is being designed to support individual members’ ability to partner with and support each other while working for the greater good.

Uniterra: Creating a Structure of Hope

Man is the remedy to man.

—Proverb of Mali¹⁷

Heralded as the first major social innovation among international development efforts in more than 30 years, Canadian-based Uniterra was founded as a new type of global initiative.¹⁸ With a 5-year, \$75-million mandate, Uniterra’s strategic mission is to contribute to achieving the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals while supporting individual countries’ national poverty reduction strategies. The Millennium Development Goals include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development—all by the year 2015.¹⁹ American economist Jeffrey Sachs, arguably the most influential—and perhaps the most controversial—voice in

international development today, asserts unequivocally, “To the extent that there are any international goals, they are the Millennium Development Goals.”²⁰

Uniterra was founded by two Canadian-based nongovernmental organizations: World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI).²¹ WUSC’s mission is to foster human development and global understanding through education and training, whereas CECI’s mission is to fight poverty and exclusion by strengthening the development capacity of disadvantaged communities.²² Between the two organizations, they have worked in more than 50 of the world’s neediest countries. The creation of the Uniterra partnership is the first time in Canadian history that an Anglophone organization (WUSC) and a Francophone organization (CECI) have chosen to form a joint venture designed to implement a major international development initiative.²³

The founding organizations do not plan to rely on a headquarters-dominated hierarchy. Such a “traditional model for social and organizational change doesn’t work [and] . . . never has. . . . The problem is that you can’t . . . bring permanent solutions in from outside.”²⁴ Uniterra’s operational vision is, therefore, to create a field-driven process of international development that draws primarily on the wisdom, experience, and expertise of local people in its network of 14 partner countries.

Although excitement about Uniterra within Canada and in the broader international development community is palpable, the leaders are well aware of the dismal record of failure that pervades international joint ventures. Historically, three quarters of all international joint ventures fail.²⁵ The inability of global organizations to work successfully across cultures remains humbling. However, with an unswerving conviction in the importance of its mission, combined with an equally strong belief that new approaches must be tried, Uniterra has chosen to focus not on the question of *if* the joint venture should proceed but rather on the question of *how* to support its success—and thus beat the statistically predictable prognosis of failure.

Prior to committing to delivering new programs in the field, Uniterra is intentionally developing an internal organizational structure and processes that can support the hope-defined courageous action that it sees as necessary for achieving meaningful change in the world. From the beginning, Uniterra understood that such processes cannot come from a single country but rather must draw on the combined wisdom of all cultures involved.

The Inaugural Global Meeting: Creating the Right Beginning

If you understand the beginning well, the end will not trouble you.

—Ashanti proverb, Ghana²⁶

To inaugurate the new partnership, Uniterra chose to bring together its representatives from Asia, Africa, and the Americas to meet in Gaborone, Botswana, in the fall of 2004. The purpose of this first global meeting was to weave together a network of relationships that would be strong enough to put Uniterra's mission into action and sustain it when faced with the enormity of the task facing organizations attempting to improve the quality of life on the planet. To develop such a network, the inaugural meeting attempted to draw on the richest possible range of available wisdom. As an American proverb counsels, "Only trees with deep roots continue to stand in a storm."

Most dictionary definitions recognize that wisdom includes both contemporary "scholarly knowledge" and traditional "wise sayings."²⁷ From the beginning, it was clear that creating an effective partnership network would require drawing on both historic wisdom traditions and contemporary scholarly expertise, on both subjective and objective experience, and on both modern and ancient traditions of insight. Given the desire to create something new (rather than simply replicating the structure of an existing organization), Uniterra drew particularly heavily on personal insight and relied much less on the objective experience of other international organizations. Drawing explicitly on the wisdom traditions of each country, the members of Uniterra selected proverbs and wisdom sayings from their respective cultures to support each aspect of their venture.

Partnering With Each Other: Developing Generative Relationships

Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable.

—Bondei proverb, Tanzania²⁸

The 50 Uniterra representatives arrived from Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Canada, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam as strangers to each other.²⁹ To begin building the strongest possible network of relationships—a web that would hold in the face of the world's greatest challenges—Uniterra relied on two sources of wisdom: scholarly knowledge and insight from personal experience. In the realm of scholarly knowledge, one of the most promising recent developments in individual and organizational psychology is the move away from deficit-based models (which focus on fixing what is not working) to strength-based models (which accentuate and leverage what is working).³⁰ On the opening morning of the global meeting, the members of Uniterra were invited to use appreciative inquiry—a strength-based approach—to interview their colleagues about what allowed their most extraordinary relationships to flourish. In cross-cultural and cross-continental pairings, the interviews elicited colleagues' most personal relationship memories and wisdom.³¹

Remember a particularly great relationship that you have had? What made it so great? So satisfying? What did you and your partner do that allowed the relationship to be so great? Which aspects of the surrounding environment supported the extraordinary quality of your relationship?

Following the interviews, participants gathered in multicultural teams to collectively make sense of their memories.

What would you say are the global “secrets” to relationship success? What wisdom have we gathered that could support Uniterra in creating a network of global relationships of this extremely high quality?

Armed with a deeper appreciation of what leads to extraordinary relationships among individuals, the appreciative inquiry process was repeated to identify the success factors supporting extraordinary inter-team and inter-organizational partnerships.³² For the first (but not last) time during the global meeting, the 50 colleagues—who even this early on the first day were already dropping their identities as strangers—were involved in wisdom creation (in combining “knowledge of what is true” with personal “insight”).³³

Although the relationship building continued informally throughout the global meeting, it was also formally supported each morning during a session designed to build trust and deepen relationships across projects, sectors, countries, and continents. During the first “morning connections,”³⁴ colleagues worked on strengthening their relationships by giving each other feedback on which of their contributions from the prior day had been most helpful.³⁵ The following day, they created a web of morning connections involving multiple brief meetings with colleagues from other parts of the world. Participants selected each encounter for its potential to help advance a current domestic project or future multinational initiative. To reduce the traditional reliance on headquarters and strengthen direct relationships among field-driven operations, the headquarters-based Canadians did not participate in that morning’s series of morning connections meetings. Each conversation deepened a particular personal relationship and increased the probability of successful non-headquarters-based cross-cultural, cross-sectorial, and cross-continental alliances.

To further develop the ability of network members to trust each other, each participant shared with colleagues an artifact that symbolized his or her most profound personal commitment to Uniterra’s goal of creating a better and more equitable world.³⁶ As the trust among colleagues deepened, generative relationships formed that were capable of producing new value for the organization—value that could not have been foreseen or created by any individual acting alone.³⁷ Thus, morning connections became essential in strengthening the generative capacity of the emerging network. Watching the process, one of the Vietnamese members of Uniterra captured the strength he

saw emerging in the network with a proverb from his culture: "A tree cannot make a small rock; however, three trees together form a big mountain."³⁸

Partnering With Oneself: Developing Insight

Some doors open only from the inside.

—Ancient Sufi saying

British poet David Whyte observes,

*We are a busy people in a busy . . . culture. But even the busiest person wants wisdom and sense in busyness. . . . All of us want to work smarter rather than harder. Yet all of us are familiar with frantic busyness as a state that continually precludes us from opening to the quiet and contemplation it takes to be smart.*³⁹

Confirming the experience of most profound wisdom traditions, Harvard University professor Howard Gardner's research identified reflection as one of the three competencies (along with leveraging and framing) that distinguishes extraordinary leaders from their more ordinary counterparts.⁴⁰ According to Gardner, "Reflection means spending a lot of time thinking about what it is that you are trying to achieve, seeing how you are doing, continuing if things are going well, [and] correcting course if not, that is, being in a constant dialectic with your work, your project, or your set of projects and not just going on blind faith [for extended periods] without stepping back and reflecting."⁴¹ Leaders who make extraordinary contributions to society take time every day to step back from the busyness of their work in the world to consider the broader meanings behind what they are doing and why and how they are doing it. In contrast, and to the detriment of the quality of their contributions, most people focus primarily (and in all too many cases exclusively) on action rather than on reflection.⁴²

To support the members of Uniterra in gaining access to their personal wisdom, and thus to their ability to make more significant contributions, reflective practices were integrated into the daily rhythm of the inaugural meeting. Rituals of quiet reflection and contemplation opened and closed each day, starting with individual reflection and journal writing and followed by small- and large-group discussions on relevant issues that the personal reflection had raised.⁴³ Although not limited to the suggested questions, individuals considered questions for reflection such as the following:

What have been the most meaningful moments for you at the meeting thus far? What questions has the discussion raised for you? What have you learned that might be of most help back home? Based on what you've learned, what experiments might you want to try? Who will be

*most interested in what you have learned? What questions do you need to ask, and of whom, to clarify your learning? What have you done so far at the meeting that has most contributed to your colleagues' learning and future success?*⁴⁴

The actual questions are not as important as the practice of setting aside daily time for silent reflection. Perhaps Arthur Frank best summarizes the value of reflection for people as committed to contributing to the world as those who gathered in Botswana for Uniterra's inaugural global meeting:

*To live is to write one's credo, every day in every act. I pray for a world that offers us each the gift of reflective space, the Sabbath quiet, to recollect the fragments of our days and acts. In those recollections we may see a little of how our lives affect others, and then imagine in the days ahead, how we might do small and specific acts that create a world we believe every person has a right to deserve.*⁴⁵

Without the wisdom that comes from personal reflection, other forms of wisdom become less relevant if not altogether meaningless.

Partnering With Generosity: Giving Gifts

Giving does not impoverish the giver.

—Proverb of Guinea⁴⁶

In the broadest sense, the nature of Uniterra's work, along with that of most international development agencies, involves gift giving—giving the world the gift of a more civil, compassionate, sustainable, and economically vibrant society. At the global meeting, Uniterra explored the nature and rituals of giving gifts across cultures. While presenting the group with gifts from their respective cultures, representatives from each country explained their culture's gift-giving rituals. Who gives a gift to whom? When? Why? Is gift giving always reciprocal? How is respect communicated? Is the gift received in public or in private? Is it opened in front of the gift giver? How does the recipient show appreciation? How does the giving and receiving of gifts help to create and strengthen relationships and partnerships?

From the exchange of gifts came a more profound understanding of the reciprocal nature of generosity. Both givers and receivers gain; both receive meaning. Unless there is mutuality, the exchange strips recipients of both their respect and their personal power. International development, at its best, is founded on a mutuality of generosity. As is wisely said in Burkina Faso, "The father guides his son, and the son guides his father."⁴⁷ Living on

a different continent and in a completely different culture, Ms. Mukhtaran similarly understood the wisdom and power of partnering with generosity:

Ms. Mukhtaran, who had never gone to school herself, used the [\$8,300 the Pakistani government had given her] . . . to build one school in the village for girls and another for boys. . . . “Why should I have spent the money on myself?” she asked, adding, “This way the money is helping . . . all the children.”

[Ms. Mukhtaran] is now studying in . . . [the new school’s] fourth-grade class.⁴⁸

As the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., recognized years ago, “Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”⁴⁹ Mutuality underlies the interrelated structure of today’s world and encompasses the very meaning of generosity in international development.

Partnering With Expertise: Developing Understanding and Competencies

With the aid of the tree, a tree-climber makes contact with the sky.

—Ashanti proverb, Ghana⁵⁰

One definition of wisdom, although not the most common, is “knowledge.”⁵¹ Although knowledge is necessary, everyone within Uniterra’s network knows that knowledge alone is not sufficient for success. To increase basic understanding, various briefing sessions were held during the global meeting to update everyone on organizational policies and practices in areas such as finance, human resources, programs and partnerships, public engagement, and advocacy skills.

In addition, to facilitate the transition from delivering primarily local projects to involving themselves with local, regional, and global initiatives simultaneously, the members of Uniterra drew on their extensive expertise to update each other in a series of briefings on current social, cultural, political, and economic conditions throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas. To further augment their country-specific knowledge, these factually based regional and country briefings were complemented with sessions designed to develop individuals’ interpersonal cross-cultural skills.⁵² As part of the inaugural meeting, Uniterra held its first Global Cultural Festival at which members invited their colleagues to participate in the music, dance, storytelling, film, drama, and other cultural rituals that are unique to their respective countries.

Similarly, over lunch each day, participants joined in animated not-so-trivial cross-cultural pursuit collaborations in which they attempted to deepen their culture-specific knowledge by discovering which of a series of seemingly incongruous facts described each country. They sought, for example, to discover for which countries the following facts are true:

*An elderly man, more than 70 years old, was elected president of this country primarily by the nation's youth.*⁵³

*This country went from being unable to produce enough rice to feed its own people to becoming one of the world's largest rice exporters.*⁵⁴

Beyond identifying the correct country, participants sought to discover the conditions that allowed particular “facts” to become reality in each country.

While explicitly adding to everyone's knowledge about the world, the not-so-trivial cross-cultural pursuit collaborations also increased Uniterra's understanding of the dynamics of possibility. How do seemingly impossible paradoxical events occur? What can a network, such as that of Uniterra, do to create more ostensibly unbelievable positive “facts” in the world? For more examples of the cultural facts that Uniterra explored, see Box 19.1.

Years ago, American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked, “The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.”⁵⁵ Unfortunately today, with more than half of the world's children living in poverty, extreme deprivation has become “the common.”⁵⁶ It takes the ability to see miracles to be able to imagine how all of the world's children could have access to basics such as clean water, enough to eat, and primary education. The ability to see possibilities for positive change, even in situations where others cannot or will not, is one of the most valuable competencies that people in international development can bring to their work. If we assess the global situation honestly, is not the ability to imagine possibility a prerequisite for all potentially effective international development efforts? Positive change—reuniting reality with possibility—has a chance of happening only if the world reclaims its ability to imagine positive possibilities.

Strangely, most international development efforts have focused primarily on the process of change. Although change management is certainly important, the core international development skill is not change management but rather the ability to discern seemingly unimaginable possibility, that is, the ability to dream of outcomes so positive that they are worthy of the world's—and our own personal—best efforts. Thus, the members of Uniterra began reclaiming their collective right to dream—their innate ability to imagine and to believe in miracles.

Box 19.1 Global Complexity: How Well Do You Know the World?**A Game of Not-So-Trivial Cross-Cultural Pursuit**

Bolivia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Canada, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam all have unique characteristics. From your knowledge of the world, decide which country best fits each description. Collaboration is encouraged. (Answers are in endnotes 112 through 123.)

- Women in this country do not change their name to their husband's family name when they get married. However, they are rarely referred to by their own name; rather, they are referred to as the wife of their husband or the mother of their first child.¹¹²
- Although the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) lists it as the third poorest country in the world, it is known as the "country of honest people."¹¹³
- With the biggest lake in the region, this country is rich in natural resources, but unfortunately, the people remain extremely poor.¹¹⁴
- This extremely hot country has a huge expanse of sand. Its rural population is very resilient, and these people continue to fight for their survival in an environment hostile to economic development.¹¹⁵
- This country produces more than 30% of the world's diamonds, yet it has a rapidly decreasing life expectancy.¹¹⁶
- This country, with the largest man-made lake in the world, was the first sub-Saharan country to gain independence.¹¹⁷
- In terms of geography, it is the second largest country in the world.¹¹⁸
- Among countries in the region, this country has ratified the most treaties and international documents supporting human rights, including those of women and children.¹¹⁹
- *Sinankounya*, or "cousins joking," is a traditional social pact deeply rooted in this country that supports the use of jokes by members of all communities in all circumstances, even in the midst of major conflict. The pact forbids rivalry and hostility among members of the community.¹²⁰
- The country's civilization is more than 2,200 years old. It had a successful history of irrigation and of trading with the Greeks and Romans already 1,500 years ago. Unfortunately, in 1995 the country earned dubious world recognition for having had the largest number of combatants killed in a single battle since World War II; between 5,000 and 7,000 people were killed overnight.¹²¹
- With more than 100 ethnic and linguistic groups, this country has still been able to maintain its independence. It has never been ruled by outsiders.¹²²
- Living in one of the most beautiful countries in the world, with a wide variety of microclimates, this country's 23 distinct ethnic groups strive hard each day to reach peace and live dignified lives.¹²³

In seeking to broaden their global perspective while deepening their cross-cultural skills and understanding, the members of Uniterra demonstrated their courage to engage with the challenges set forth for the world by Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic:

There are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself, while something else, still indistinct, were arising from the rubble. . . .

This state of affairs has its social and political consequences. The planetary civilization to which we all belong confronts us with global challenges. We stand helpless before them because our civilization has essentially globalized only the surface of our lives. . . .

[Leaders] are rightly worried by the problems of finding the key to ensure the survival of a civilization that is global and multicultural. . . . The central . . . task of . . . [the 21st century] . . . is the creation of a new model of co-existence among the various cultures, peoples, races, and religious spheres within a single interconnected civilization.⁵⁷

At its inaugural meeting and, more important, in its work around the world, Uniterra is attempting to learn to be both global and local—to respect the common humanity of all people while honoring each culture’s characteristic uniqueness—and to recognize the depth of tragedy in the world while continuing to believe in the power of creating miracles. As Nobel Laureate Albert Einstein understood, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”⁵⁸

Partnering With the Unknown: A Parking Lot for Questions

*For every problem there is one solution
which is simple, neat, and wrong.*

—H. L. Mencken, American political commentator⁵⁹

Honoring Confucius’s dictum that “real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance,” questions that could not be answered immediately during the conference briefings and discussions were sent to a “parking lot for questions.”⁶⁰ The parking lot for questions was a highly visible place where an unanswered question could stay posted until someone within the group, not necessarily the presenter, found an answer.⁶¹ Questions that could not be answered remained indefinitely in the parking lot—a testament to the fact that, in the type of ambiguous, rapidly changing environment faced by all development organizations today, many of the most important questions will remain unanswerable.

The parking lot for questions visibly contradicted the leftover, 400-year-old Newtonian worldview that gave us the illusion that everything in life is either “known” or currently “unknown-but-ultimately-knowable.” It is not—and certainly not in the complex world of international development. With the help of chaos theory and the complexity sciences, Uniterra, and all the rest of us, have been helped to understand that beyond the known and the unknown-but-knowable is the unknowable.⁶² We therefore accept that in today’s turbulent environment, good questions often guide us much more powerfully than do their hoped-for answers. The essence of wisdom is to know that we do not know.⁶³

Partnering With the World: Engaging the Public

*It requires wisdom to understand wisdom;
the music is nothing if the audience is deaf.*

—Walter Lippmann, political commentator⁶⁴

Some of the fact-, technique-, and knowledge-oriented briefings led to discussions about broader underlying issues. The presentation on public engagement, for example, could not help but raise questions about the reasons for the public’s general lack of awareness, and similar lack of concern, about global issues and global crises.

Is it that the public doesn’t know about Ms. Mukhtaran? Or is it that they don’t care?

How could they not know? How could they not care?

Using knowledge alone, such questions cannot be addressed. For even minimally appropriate levels of understanding, we must recombine knowledge with more classical wisdom-based approaches to understanding—those of insight and sensemaking.

How could they not know? How could they not care? Marianne Williamson thoughtfully reflects on why the public seemingly neither knows nor cares: “The fact that we go about our lives as though the survival of the world is not at stake is not the sign of a stiff upper lip. It is the sign, rather, of a society not yet able or willing to hold a conversation about its deepest pain.”⁶⁵ How does Uniterra engage that public? A public that is “not yet able or willing to hold a conversation about its deepest pain”?

In the same global conversation, South Africa’s Archbishop Desmond Tutu quietly offers his own succinct wisdom: “My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”⁶⁶ Decades earlier, German-born Albert Einstein foreshadowed Tutu’s words: “A human being is part of

a whole, the universe. Our task must be to free ourselves from the delusion of separateness.”⁶⁷ Because Uniterra is a partnership organization, is that public engagement role? To remind the world that “we can only be human together”? To help the world free itself of its delusion of separateness? And if so, how does Uniterra do it? The questions, although crucially important and unequivocally needing the best of both our knowledge and our wisdom, may in fact remain unanswerable. For now, they remain prominently in the parking lot of all our minds.

Partnering With Structure: Designing a Field-Driven Process

When the moon is not full, the stars shine more brightly.

—Proverb of the Buganda people, Uganda⁶⁸

Unlike many international development efforts, Uniterra’s operational goal is to create a field-driven process that draws primarily on the wisdom, experience, and expertise of local people.⁶⁹ Rather than relying on a traditional headquarters-dominated hierarchy, as is still the case in many international development efforts, Uniterra seeks to design a web of partnerships within the organization as well as with businesses, government agencies, and civil sector organizations external to Uniterra. To benefit from the partnerships, Uniterra plans to develop its ability to leverage the synergies inherent in working across organizations, cultures, countries, and continents.⁷⁰

Using the vocabulary of international business, Uniterra seeks to operate more in the fluid, flattened, and networked structure of 21st-century transnational organizations than in the more centralized traditional hierarchies of 20th-century multinational and multidomestic organizations.⁷¹ Given the complex turbulent environment facing all international development efforts, the proposed partnership structure offers flexibility and responsiveness, and therefore more hope for success, than does any centralized hierarchical structure in which a single Northern Hemisphere donor country attempts to impose solutions, however well intended, on the peoples of the Southern Hemisphere. Not surprisingly, the organizations that founded Uniterra are already taking the lead in creating and using decentralized and networked structures. Thus, the current operational challenge facing Uniterra is to extend and expand the structures of the founding organizations, based on historical experience and new opportunities, into a flattened network of partnerships.⁷² That no one knows exactly how to create and effectively use such a network for international development in the 21st century is evident to everyone; that it needs to be tried is even more evident. As an ancient Chinese proverb advises, “Better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”⁷³

From Traditional Mechanistic Organization Charts to More Fluid Organic Structures

The Talmud tells us, “We don’t see things as they are. We see things as we are.”⁷⁴ Philosopher and scholar Thomas Kuhn, in explaining how thought systems change, counseled that it is impossible to see something new until one has a metaphor that will let one perceive it.⁷⁵ So to be able to invent a new structure, the members of Uniterra first need to change themselves and their thinking. Prior to changing their thinking, they must change the metaphor through which they see the world and their organization. Not surprisingly, in the process of becoming open to new metaphors and new thinking, individuals themselves change.

What allows individuals and organizations to let go of prior worldviews and approaches that seemingly worked in the past but might no longer be appropriate? To even ask the right questions requires a profound commitment to what the organization is seeking to accomplish and a deep trust in the individuals involved. Otherwise, the completely human response is “why bother?” Canadian Ian Wilson wisely observes, “No amount of sophistication is going to allay the fact that all your knowledge is about the past and all your decisions are about the future.”⁷⁶ To move ahead in spite of not knowing, which is where profound hope and commitment lead people, is to embrace the unknown while not yet knowing whether it ultimately will become knowable or continue to remain beyond the grasp of our understanding.⁷⁷

Following the advice of chaos and complexity theorists, Uniterra chose to experiment with envisioning its emerging organizational structure as organic rather than continuing to perceive it through the lens of a traditional mechanistic organization chart. Following Kuhn’s advice to change metaphors in order to change thinking patterns, Uniterra selected the metaphor of a spider plant to catalyze its ability to see the new possibilities inherent in a more organic organizational structure.⁷⁸ Using this biological metaphor, the members of Uniterra began questioning the role, or lack thereof, of all forms of centralized leadership, authority, and control. *If Uniterra was to be like a spider plant, what role would the central pot play? How small could the central pot become? What would be the best ways to connect the offshoots to the pot?*⁷⁹ Similarly, they questioned the relationship of the worldwide country operations to Canada. *How should Uniterra define its stems—its “umbilical cords”? How could it best use its stems to support the autonomy of each decentralized region and project (each offshoot) while still ensuring the network’s overall integration and accountability?*⁸⁰ They also questioned how Uniterra as a whole could best support the individual country and sector operations in working more directly with one another. *How could Uniterra encourage its network of offshoots to work more closely with each other without directly involving the pot? How could the spider plant metaphor help Uniterra’s network to manage its multiple internal and external partnerships in a generative and effective, yet decentralized, fashion?*⁸¹

Management scholar Gareth Morgan suggests that, when using the spider plant metaphor for organizational design, a number of insights are particularly relevant. From Morgan's perspective, Uniterra needs to do the following:⁸²

- *Break the constraint of a large pot.* Uniterra's overall network can increase its effectiveness and grow larger in a decentralized fashion while reducing the size of its headquarters.
- *Integrate operations without exerting direct control.* The success of Uniterra's decentralization depends on creating good stems, not on instituting traditional control mechanisms.
- *Avoid getting caught in the uniformity syndrome.* Uniterra needs to avoid cloning. It needs to adapt each partnership (each hybrid offshoot) to its particular local environment and situation.
- *Encourage bumblebees.* To benefit from potential synergies and field-driven coordination, Uniterra needs to encourage the offshoots to work directly with each other without involving the central pot.

Shifting from a more centralized hierarchy to a flatter, more inclusive organizational structure is often most difficult for the people in the center. Giving away power, even for the best reasons, is never easy. One of Uniterra's Asian-based Canadian directors struggled with how to empower his local colleagues so that they could take more responsibility for making decisions. He did not want to continue the culturally expected hierarchical pattern in which he, as "the boss," made all of the decisions, nor did he want to violate fundamental cultural norms by suddenly seemingly abdicating his decision-making responsibilities. His innovative decision was to request that his Asian colleagues offer him a "suggested course of action" whenever they brought him problems to resolve. He could then role-model the more empowering and inclusive behavior he desired in the network by simply accepting and then publicly implementing his colleagues' best suggestions. In cases where their initial suggestions were less than what the situations called for, he could coach his colleagues (primarily by asking questions) on ways to improve their suggestions. In both cases, he would be augmenting the capacity of the network as a whole to assess situations appropriately and to develop effective courses of action. The resulting dynamic would be a subtle, culturally appropriate transfer of power from the center to the network.

As the members of Uniterra worked with the spider plant metaphor, they quickly came to realize that the type of structure they were seeking to design was less centralized and yet more integrated than their image of a spider plant. In recognizing the need to stretch their thinking, and the metaphor, even further, they began letting the image of the spider plant evolve into a new equally organic but less centralized metaphor.

The spider plant metaphor evolved into the metaphor of a web. Yet the web metaphor also raised concerns. Isn't the image of a web too fragile to support the network of strong partnerships that Uniterra seeks to foster? From the perspective of organizational design, the most optimistic answer to the "Isn't a web too fragile?" question is a cautious "Probably, although we hope not." From the perspective of ancient cultural wisdom, however, the answer to the same question is a resounding "No, it's absolutely not too fragile!" As an Ethiopian proverb asserts, "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion."⁸³ "Yes," the ancient wisdom declares, "a web is certainly strong enough to support the most ambitious aspirations."

From Maximizing Rules to Minimizing Specifications

How do complex adaptive systems, such as the web of innovative, self-organizing initiatives that make up Uniterra, simultaneously support the network's overall success, leverage its multicultural relationships, and give as much freedom as possible to each individual partnership? For organic web-like networks in complex environments, such as those faced in international development, rules do not work. Rules, in acting like control mechanisms, attempt to force people and systems to act in uniform and predictable ways. In attempting to assert maximum control, rules constrict behavior and thereby impede needed flexibility and innovation.⁸⁴ In contrast to rules, minimum specifications—referred to as "min-specs"—do work.⁸⁵ Min-specs are the minimum critical success factors an organization needs to succeed. To operate effectively, Uniterra needs to avoid creating rules and to limit itself to using the minimum number of specifications needed to guide the overall network toward success.

Selecting the fewest and best min-specs is not easy. To make certain that Uniterra chooses min-specs based on its current and future strengths, its search must rely on strength-based questions. As Uniterra engages in the process of identifying the best min-specs, it will need to use appreciative questions such as the following:⁸⁶

1. *Think about a moment when you and your partners performed at their absolute best, a moment when you were particularly and rightfully proud of the team. Describe the moment to your colleagues.*
2. *What are the min-specs that supported those moments of extremely high performance—those moments when your partnership achieved outstanding success? What were the conditions without which it would have been impossible to reach that level of outstanding success?*

Following engagement with these first appreciative questions, which help to identify a broad list of possible min-specs, the second step is to limit the

number of specifications to the smallest set needed for the global network's overall success:

3. *What are the min-specs for extremely high network performance that appear to be necessary in all situations worldwide?*
4. *Is there any circumstance in which you can imagine extremely high performance without one of the min-specs you have identified? If so, drop it. It is not a min-spec.*

In minimizing the number of specifications guiding it, an organization maximizes its freedom to respond appropriately and effectively to whatever combination of challenges currently confront it or will face it in the future. However, the additional freedom afforded by min-specs cannot be realized if those participating in the network have not developed a high level of trust in their own thinking and wisdom as well as that of their colleagues.

Partnering With Challenges: Asking Wicked Questions

[Wisdom is] the ability to offer useful advice to others about the pragmatics of everyday life.

—C. Peterson and M. Seligman, psychologists⁸⁷

The Nepalese are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and backwardness.⁸⁸ Nearly 50% of Nepalese live in absolute poverty, lacking even basic amenities.⁸⁹ Poverty in Nepal continues to increase while the gap between the rich and the poor widens.⁹⁰ At the same time, the ability of both the economic and social sectors to provide services is decreasing. This deteriorating situation is exacerbated by decades of political conflict and a dearth of functional public institutions. Unfortunately, according to concerned Nepalese, development experts over the years have succeeded in bringing to the table more issues than solutions.

Given the government's lack of accountability, should Uniterra focus on developing the capacity of Nepalese organizations to govern effectively and provide adequate services? Which other countries in the world (Ghana? Guatemala? Sri Lanka?) have addressed similar challenges successfully? How might the Nepalese draw on this global expertise? How should Uniterra proceed if it wants to avoid joining the cluster of well-intentioned, but ultimately ineffective, development efforts?⁹¹

Challenges faced in international development are complex, and complex challenges never have easy answers. Complex challenges are sometimes referred to as wicked problems because many of their characteristics are not reducible to their constituent parts.⁹² When trying to understand complex

challenges, neither simple nor complicated cause-and-effect relationships explain the current situation or predict future scenarios accurately. Descriptively, whereas the solutions to simple and complicated problems tend to follow rules, and thus appear to act in a more predictable machine-like manner, complex problems do not follow rules, and thus seem to behave in more unpredictable lifelike ways. As Uniterra and the Nepalese are well aware, if the situation was merely simple or complicated, rather than complex, the problem of poverty in Nepal, and in other countries, would have been solved years ago.

Making the challenges even more difficult for Uniterra is its awareness that, even when resolved successfully, a solution to a complex problem in one situation rarely functions as a recipe that can be applied to other seemingly similar situations. Success in reducing the HIV/AIDS rate in one country—Brazil, for example—fails to act as a template for reducing the infection and mortality rates in other countries.⁹³ Therefore, complex challenges call for a combination of wisdom and more traditional analytic approaches combined with seemingly infinite creativity, persistence, and patience.

Representatives from Uniterra's 14 countries brought their most daunting operational challenges—all of which are complex—to the global meeting and asked their colleagues for help in addressing them. To make the best use of the assembled network of wisdom, experience, expertise, and alternative perspectives, Uniterra formed cross-cultural and cross-continental coaching teams to work on each challenge. While their colleagues from around the world listened, country representatives described, from their own points of view, what made each challenge so difficult and frustrating. In response, the coaches resisted the temptation to immediately suggest possible solutions. Rather, they initially endeavored to deepen each team's understanding of its particular challenge by exposing underlying assumptions. The coaches asked questions, often referred to as wicked questions, intended to reveal contradictory assumptions that the team might be holding about the challenge itself, its history, the context, the organizations involved, and possible outcomes.⁹⁴ Such wicked questions, which never have obvious answers, often reveal paradoxical assumptions that the team has allowed to subconsciously shape, and therefore constrain, its actions and choices. Because such assumptions—even when completely inaccurate—are often implicitly accepted as true based on popular beliefs, they are rarely questioned and are particularly difficult to expose. "Articulating these assumptions provides an opportunity to see patterns of thought and surface differences. . . . [Such] patterns and differences can then be used . . . to find creative alternatives for stubborn problems."⁹⁵

Using wicked questions, along with other appreciative techniques, nominally slows down the process of addressing challenges, including in situations whose severity begs for immediate action. Such slowed-down processes, however, are much more likely to produce options that work in complex situations than are any of the more commonly used, and seemingly more efficient,

analytic approaches. Underscoring the trap of apparent, but false, efficiency, the Shona people in Zimbabwe remind us, “Running is not getting there!”⁹⁶ The wisdom of the people of Niger reinforces the same warning: “Going slowly does not keep one from reaching the destination.”⁹⁷

Partnering With Success: Designing Reality Based on Commitment to a Dream

Hope doesn't kill; it's rushing that kills.

—Proverb of the Ndebele people, Zimbabwe

Actuary and consultant Taddy Blecher joined the members of Uniterra for an evening of intense discussions on the power of courage, tenacity, partnering, and believing in self-created miracles to turn seemingly impossible dreams into reality. Lauded by South Africa's President Mbeki as one of the country's pioneers of change, Blecher officially launched CIDA University in Johannesburg in 2002.⁹⁸ Blecher's dream “is to mould motivated students from the country's poorest and most marginalized communities into a new generation of business leaders and high-powered entrepreneurs who will spread knowledge and prosperity across the continent.”⁹⁹ CIDA operates on a fraction of the cost of other universities. To keep expenses down, “from the outset, the campus harnessed multimedia technology in its lecture rooms, got students involved in the day-to-day running of the university, and set up partnerships with a range of companies and other institutions which enabled CIDA to secure ‘donations in kind,’ study and other materials, and the teaching services of private-sector professionals.”¹⁰⁰ Not surprisingly, the now-accredited university received more than 19,000 applications for its 1,600 places.¹⁰¹ Living its motto, “It takes a child to raise a village,” students partner with their home communities to pass on their learning. In just one month, for example, “CIDA students taught 300,000 young people about AIDS and money management in communities throughout South Africa.”¹⁰² Thus, CIDA operationalizes the wisdom of the Ouambo people of the Central African Republic: “The sun does not rise for one person alone.”¹⁰³

CIDA University developed its innovative education model and recruits students based on an appreciative approach aimed at amplifying positive deviance.¹⁰⁴ As some observers describe it, CIDA's business model aims at leveraging self-created miracles. CIDA looks for “learners who, despite severe disadvantages, have [excelled] . . . academically and who [also] found time to . . . contribute to their communities.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, CIDA looks for positive deviants, that is, students who have succeeded in environments where most other kids could not. Before opening the university, Blecher and his colleagues studied these surprisingly successful students (these self-created miracles) to understand what allowed them to deviate in such positive ways from the more common patterns of failure experienced by most of

their friends. They then built CIDA's curriculum and selection criteria based on the distinguishing characteristics that allowed these outstanding young people to achieve so much more than their similarly disadvantaged peers.

In the space of just a few years, CIDA University's graduates have begun winning top performance awards and attracting Africa's most forward-looking employers.¹⁰⁶ The corporate partnerships, however, are not motivated simply by altruism on the part of business. As one African mining executive explained, "CIDA University is the next Silicon Valley. Any African company that doesn't recognize that will not succeed in the twenty-first century."¹⁰⁷ Galia Durbach, an executive with First National Bank of South Africa, agrees: "We see it as sort of an incubator for the talented leaders of the future."¹⁰⁸ CIDA identifies and brilliantly educates the best of the best. No company can succeed in the 21st century by hiring the second or third tier. No society can succeed without broadly educating its population, including the best of the best.

The members of Uniterra have begun experimenting with appreciative approaches to help them recognize, and ultimately use, positive deviance to bring about extraordinary organizational performance and outcomes. As a first step, they reviewed their performance over the prior year and selected photographs highlighting their most spectacular moments of achievement. At the meeting, they shared the pictures with colleagues in what came to be known as Uniterra's First Annual Photo Exhibition. The group began seeing global patterns in what led to spectacular performance—positive deviance—and looking for ways to create such conditions more consistently.

In viewing the gallery of photographs, the members of Uniterra also became aware of which pictures captured most people's attention and which, in contrast, were most easily ignored. They came to recognize the power of extraordinary images (those that deviate visually in a positive way) to capture the group's visual, emotional, and intellectual attention. In our visually overcrowded world, capturing people's attention and interest—whether in engaging the public or in obtaining the commitment of colleagues—is critically important yet never easy. Amid the cacophony of visual stimuli bombarding each of us every day, the competition for our attention to notice specific images, and the messages they embed, is intense. Yet if we fail to capture people's attention, the process of engagement will not even begin.

Partnering With Hope: Designing the Architecture of the Future

We judge a person's wisdom by his hope.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet¹⁰⁹

"Whenever we try to speak up in an organization, we reveal the precarious balance of innocence and experience in our voice. Too much innocence and

we are sensed as ‘dangerous idealists,’ too much experience and we may sabotage everything we touch with a practiced cynicism.”¹¹⁰ The challenge facing Uniterra, along with every other organization that is committed to helping create a better and more equitable world, is how to remarry wisdom with hope—experience with idealism. Wisdom and hope are what organizations and individuals bring to challenging situations; they are never simply the outcome of an objective assessment of reality. In Pakistan, there was neither wisdom nor hope in the rape and threatened murder of Ms. Mukhtaran. If she had allowed circumstances, or an objective assessment of her situation, to define her reality, she would have succumbed to historical precedent long ago and accepted suicide as her preordained fate. She did not, and we—the rest of the world—look on in awe at her wisdom, courage, and unrealistic (naive) optimism.

The struggle for the members of Uniterra, and ultimately their choice, is to find the courage to approach a world that is sadly lacking in wisdom and hope and to bring both qualities more fully back into their work and the world. No matter how admirable, Ms. Mukhtaran’s efforts, as one woman alone, cannot change the world. A global network of Ms. Mukhtarans, however, could change the world. It is for that reason that Uniterra was launched and that many people support it. With palpable yearning, we wait and hope that Uniterra’s partnership network of wisdom, experience, and commitment will make a difference in the quality of our lives and those of our children and our children’s children.

*We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors;
we borrow it from our children.*

—Kenyan proverb¹¹¹

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I acknowledge the committed and forward-thinking leadership of Michel Chaurrette and Paul Davidson, the executive directors of the two founding organizations, CECI and WUSC, respectively, as well as that of Claude Perras, the executive director of Uniterra, the new joint venture initiative. Equally important, I recognize the members of Uniterra’s network, without whose courage, commitment, creativity, and humanity no idea of this magnitude would be imaginable.

Notes

1. Definition from *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1969, p. 1639).

2. “Metaphysics refers to the branch of philosophy that attempts to understand the fundamental nature of all reality, whether visible or invisible” (<http://websyte.com/alan/metamul.htm>).

3. Jomo Kenyatta, founding father and undisputed leader of Kenya, came to be known as *Mzee*, which is Swahili for “respected elder.” In Swahili, he was also referred to as *Taa ya Kenya* (the “Light of Kenya”) for having brought the light of independence to his country. For a more in-depth background of Kenyatta, see <http://kenya.rcbowen.com/government/kenyatta.html>. The quote attributed to Kenyatta is found at www.aap.org/advocacy/archives/jun70.htm.

4. Story excerpted from Kristof (2004). Kristof is a *New York Times* op-ed columnist who invites contributions to help Ms. Mukhtaran and her schools. Send checks to Mukhtaran Bibi, c/o Nicholas Kristof, The New York Times, 229 West 43rd Street, New York, NY 10036. Copyright © 2004 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.

5. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1982) defines courage as the “willingness to confront risk to do what one thinks is right.” Quinn (1996) stated that courage requires “walking naked into the land of uncertainty” (p. 3). By anyone's definition, Ms. Mukhtaran certainly demonstrated courage. For a discussion of courageous principled action, see Worline and Quinn (2003).

6. See Kristof (2004).

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Barack Obama included the phrase “the audacity of hope” in his July 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention in Boston (“Everyone Loves Obama,” 2004). Hawaiian-born Obama is the Harvard University-educated son of Kansas and Kenyan parents and at the time was a newly elected member of the U.S. Congress. Perhaps the reason why hope is considered as audacious within the fields of leadership and organizational studies is that it has been ignored so consistently (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 253). Only now, in the 21st century, is there initial research on hope and leadership, including Peterson and Luthans's (2003) particularly interesting study suggesting that “high-hope leaders have higher performing business units and more satisfied associates with lower levels of turnover” (as cited in Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 254) than do their lower hope colleagues.

11. Quote attributed to Socrates, a Greek philosopher; as cited on the Quote DB website (www.quotedb.com/quotes/1499).

12. Definition from *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1969, p. 1639). For alternative definitions of wisdom, see Peterson and Seligman (2004), who included definitions such as “the ability to judge correctly in matters relating to life and conduct; . . . understanding what was true, meaningful, or lasting. An emphasis on scholarly learning, . . . on good judgment in the service of effective living, . . . and an emphasis on one's insight into transcendent ends rather than practical means” (p. 183). For a review of psychological perspectives on wisdom, see Sternberg (1998).

13. As stated by Hock (1997) and cited on the Paradigm Shift International website (www.parashift.com/Speakers/Speak010.htm). Hock, one of 30 living laureates of the Business Hall of Fame, designed the “chaordic” organizational structure of VISA that led to its becoming the world's largest credit card company.

14. Quote from Albright's Harvard University commencement address on June 5, 1997, as cited in “Albright's Words” (1997).

15. Albert Einstein (1879–1955), one of the world's noted physicists, received the Nobel Prize for his theory of relativity. Born in Germany, Einstein immigrated to

the United States in 1933. The quote is cited on the Motivational and Inspirational Corner of the American System for Success website (www.motivational-inspirational-corner.com/getquote.html?authorid=23).

16. Quote from Mahatma Gandhi, as cited in Franck, Roze, and Connolly (1998, p. 93). Note that the more common version of this quote, attributed to Gandhi is “Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

17. This proverb was shared by the members of Uniterra from Mali who attended the global meeting in Botswana. Although the traditional proverb is “Man is the remedy to man,” the sense of the proverb is non-gender specific: “People are the remedy to people.”

18. For a detailed description of the stages leading up to the initial formation of Uniterra, see Aarup and Raufflet (2004).

19. For more details on the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, see the United Nations website (www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

20. Quote from Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, as cited in Eviatar (2004).

21. Although the majority of international business literature has focused on the private sector and multinational enterprises, there is a growing interest in understanding the role, dynamics, and contribution of nongovernmental organizations to value creation. For a review, see Teegen, Doh, and Vachani (2004).

22. World University Service of Canada (WUSC) is a leading Canadian development organization that has been active since 1939. WUSC is committed to fostering human development and global understanding through education and training and is devoted to the concept that all peoples are entitled to the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to a more equitable world. WUSC’s development work is supported by the Canadian International Development Agency, AusAid (Australia), NORAD (Norway), HIVOS (The Netherlands), the Asian Development Bank, and individual donors.

23. Anglophone organizations are those working primarily in English, whereas Francophone organizations are those working primarily in French. The linguistic diversity reflects the constitutionally supported multicultural nature of Canada.

24. Quote from Jerry Sternin, as cited in Dorsey (2000, p. 284). Sternin is a highly respected international development expert whose radical and successful approach to child nutrition was first implemented with starving children in Vietnam and later served as a model for rehabilitating tens of thousands of children in more than 20 countries worldwide. His approach is based on amplifying positive deviance. For a description of the process, see Dorsey (2000).

25. Most joint venture research has been conducted on the merger of companies; a comparable literature on international joint ventures among international development organizations does not exist. The three-quarters failure rate is as reported in the A. T. Kearney study cited in Haebeck, Kroger, and Trum (2000) and in Schuler and Jackson (2001). The same study, as cited by Schuler and Jackson, concludes that “only 15 percent of mergers and acquisitions in the U.S. achieve their objectives, as measured by share value, return on investment, and post-combination profitability.” For research on the instability of international joint ventures, see the summary by Yan and Zeng (1999). Although the definitions (complete termination vs. significant change of ownership) and overall results vary, numerous studies have reported substantial international joint venture instability, including 55% termination reported by Harrigan

(1988), 49% termination reported by Barkema and Vermeulen (1997), and 68% instability through termination or acquisition reported by Park and Russo (1996). See also Hammel's (1991) classic article, "Competition for Competence and Inter-partner Learning Within International Strategic Alliances."

26. Ashanti proverb, as drawn from Burton (1865) and found on the Daily African Proverbs website (www.afriprov.org/resources/dailyproverbs.htm).

27. Wisdom, as defined in the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1969, p. 1639).

28. Bondei proverb, as found on the Afritopic website (www.afritopic.com/afritopic-proverbs-a.htm).

29. Most participants at the meeting knew only the other people from their own country or region. Only a few had traveled worldwide and met all of those involved previous to this meeting.

30. Positive organizational behavior focuses on "that which is extraordinarily positive in organizations—the very best of the human condition and the most ennobling organizational behaviors and outcomes" (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003, p. 207). Focusing on "the virtuous or excellent," it is the "positive cousin" of the traditional negative focus in psychology and organizational behavior (Dodge, 1985). For a discussion of the newly emerging field of positive organizational scholarship, see Cameron and colleagues (2003). For a discussion of appreciative inquiry, see Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003) and Fry, Barrett, Seiling, and Whitney (2002).

31. Interview questions were designed with the help of David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University (personal communication, September 2004) based on his appreciative inquiry approach. See also the current research of Peterson and Seligman (2003) documenting the nature of people's most positive relationships.

32. Later in the global meeting, the members of Uniterra analyzed more systematically the quality of the inter-organizational partnerships they were currently in and were considering forming using the "STAR" analytic process designed by Zimmerman and Hayday (1999, 2003).

33. Definition from *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1969, p. 1639).

34. The idea for morning connections came from management professors Henry Mintzberg (McGill University, Canada) and Jonathan Gosseling (Lancaster University, United Kingdom). Adler first introduced it in their Advanced Leadership Program. Morning connections build on the practice in Mintzberg's International Program for Practicing Managers in which each day starts with morning reflections. Theoretically, morning connections are based on research on the importance and power of high-quality connections in organizations and work-related settings (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

35. Underlying this morning connections exercise were the concepts of generosity and gratitude. Gratitude, considered as a virtue in all philosophical traditions, is defined as "positive recognition of benefits received" (Emmons, 2003, p. 82). In the exercise, the only allowed response to receiving positive personal feedback was "thank you"—a clear expression of gratitude. Expressing gratitude is a form of appreciation. According to Kaczmarek and Cooperrider (1997), to appreciate is to "deliberately notice, anticipate, and heighten positive potential." Thus, the exercise was used to develop the appreciative capacity of participants. As described in the chapter, other forms of appreciative inquiry were used throughout the meeting, with

each being based on the premise that “mutual valuing and affirmation is necessary for collaborative learning and social transformation” (Tenkasi, 2000, as cited in Emmons, 2003, p. 88). Although not yet well developed in practice or in research, it has been recommended that management and leadership programs incorporate modules on gratitude (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001; Emmons, 2003).

36. The exercise using an artifact to symbolize profound commitment was designed by Frances Westley as part of the opening sessions for the McGill–McConnell Program for Leaders in the Voluntary Sector. For Uniterra, the question of profound commitment, as symbolized by the selected artifacts, was focused specifically on each individual’s commitment to Uniterra’s mission and hoped-for outcomes. Whereas other organizations often focus on how to create meaning in the workplace, the meaningfulness of Uniterra’s goals and hoped-for outcomes—creating a better and more equitable world—makes such a pursuit irrelevant. Working for Uniterra is perceived by all parties involved to be extremely meaningful and significant. Note that in Uniterra’s case, as well as in the case of other similar organizations, “meaningfulness is not necessarily dependent on the goals actually being realized; the pursuit of valued goals . . . may by itself foster a sense of purpose” (Baumeister, 1991, and Emmons, 1991, as cited in Pratt & Ashford, 2003, p. 311). For a review of the recent literature on fostering meaningfulness, see Pratt and Ashford (2003).

37. For a discussion of the importance of generative relationships in chaotic and complex organizational environments, see Zimmerman, Lindberg, and Plsek (1998).

38. Proverb contributed by Duong Hoang, agriculture and rural development sectorial specialist from Vietnam.

39. Quote from Whyte (1994, p. 98).

40. Gardner, as cited in the Howard Gardner Creativity and Leadership Video Guide (p. 20). See Gardner (1995).

41. See Gardner (1995).

42. For other authors strongly supporting reflective practice for leaders and managers, see Drucker (1999), Loehr and Schwartz (2001), and Palmer (2000).

43. The pattern of opening each seminar day with individual reflection, followed by small- and large-group reflection, was initiated by Henry Mintzberg in his innovative International Management for Practicing Managers global executive program. The pattern has since been used in other McGill University–based programs, such as Mintzberg’s Advanced Leadership Program and the McGill–McConnell Program for Leaders in the Voluntary Sector.

44. The emphasis on being a contribution is supported by Zander and Zander’s (2000) discussion on moving from success to significance. The Zanders view leaders’ and managers’ primary role as “being a contribution.”

45. Quote from Arthur Frank, as cited in Franck and colleagues (1998, p. 280). Note that a new first edition of Franck and colleagues’ book was published in 2000 by St. Martin’s Press.

46. Proverb shared at the global meeting by the Uniterra representatives from Guinea.

47. Proverb shared at the global meeting by Uniterra representatives from Burkina Faso. The wisdom it offered Uniterra on how to approach international development was inescapable. Although stated here as it is said in Burkina Faso, the meaning is non–gender specific: “The parent guides the child, and the child guides the parent.”

48. See Kristof (2004).

49. Quote from King (1963), as cited on the U.S. Department of State's, International Programs website (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/civilrtrts/excerpts.htm>).
50. Ashanti proverb, as cited on the Heritage Classic website (www.eachoneteachone.com/heritagetennis).
51. Definition of wisdom, as found in *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (1963, p. 1025).
52. For a discussion of the cross-cultural management skills and competencies needed for global success, see Adler (2007).
53. The country is Senegal, and the president referred to here is Abdoulaye Wade. According to former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Senegal is a "beacon of light for other African countries. Senegal is 'a beacon' that can 'show the way' to free elections and a democratic way of life in other sub-Saharan countries. . . . Much of Senegal's success . . . could be attributed to its president Abdoulaye Wade . . . , a modern version of a Renaissance man, trained in law and economics, literature, and math. Today he is leading a country that is helping to lead a continent." Albright was speaking at the National Democratic Institute's ceremony on December 6, 2004, at which Wade was awarded the W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award, as reported in Ellis (2004) and as cited on the AllAfrica.com website.
54. Vietnam.
55. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1883) was an influential American poet and essayist. This quote is found in Emerson (1992, p. 38).
56. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report released on December 9, 2004, stated, "More than a billion children—over half the children in the world—suffer extreme deprivation because of war, HIV/AIDS, or poverty The report said that nearly half the estimated 3.6 million people killed in wars since 1990 were children, reflecting the fact that civilians increasingly have become the victims in contemporary conflicts" (Dugger, 2004).
57. Quoted from the speech given by Vaclav Havel in accepting the Liberty Award (Havel, 1994).
58. Quote from Einstein, as cited on the Quote DB website (www.quotedb.com/quotes/12).
59. Henry Louis Mencken (1880–1956) was the most prominent political commentator, newspaperman, and book reviewer of his time. See www.goucher.edu/library/mencken/mencken_homepage.htm.
60. Confucius was a Chinese philosopher (551 to 479 BCE). This quote is found on the Quotations Page website (www.quotationspage.com/quote/4316.html).
61. E. Raufflet of Montreal's Hautes Etudes Commerciales recommended creating a space at the global meeting for a parking lot for questions.
62. Brenda Zimmerman, a York University management professor, presented the framework based on complexity theory, diagramming the continuum of the known, to the unknown-but-knowable, to the unknowable. For further discussion, see Zimmerman and colleagues (1998).
63. According to Meacham (1990), "the essence of wisdom . . . lies not in what is known but rather in the manner in which that knowledge is held and in how that knowledge is put to use. To be wise is not to know particular facts but to know without excessive confidence or excessive cautiousness. . . . To both accumulate

knowledge while remaining suspicious of it, and recognizing that much remains unknown, is to be wise" (pp. 185, 187). Thus, "the essence of wisdom is in knowing that one does not know, in the appreciation that knowledge is fallible" (p. 210) (as cited in Weick, 2003, p. 71). "To act with wisdom is to accept ignorance, to be wary of simplification" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001, pp. 11–12, 59–62).

64. American Walter Lippmann won a Pulitzer prize for his literary work. This quote is found on the WorldofQuotes.com website (www.worldofquotes.com/author/Walter-Lippman/1).

65. Williamson is an American author and lecturer. This quote is from the introduction to her latest book (Williamson, 2004).

66. Desmond Tutu is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. This quote is his attempt to take the meaning of *ubuntu* or *botho* into English. The quote is found on the Schipul website (www.schipul.com/en/quotes/display.asp?). See also Tutu's latest book (Tutu, 2004).

67. Quote from Albert Einstein is found on the DesigningLife.com website (<http://designinglife.com/index.php/Main/CollaborationMints>).

68. This Buganda proverb is found in the African Proverbs section on the Oneproverb.net website (<http://oneproverb.net/bwfolder/africanbw.html>).

69. Note that whereas the World Bank, for example, still tends to use a more centralized approach, many of the initiatives of the Scandinavian countries employ more decentralized efforts that support local autonomy.

70. For a discussion of the advantages of cultural synergy and the process for achieving synergy, see Adler (2002).

71. For a conceptualization and discussion of transnational corporations, see Bartlett and Ghoshal (1998). For further discussion on the contrasting organizational cultures among domestic, multidomestic, multinational, and transnational organizations, see Adler (2002).

72. CECI, one of the two founding organizations, is a leader in having developed, experimented with, and used a more localized decentralized structure. CECI has drawn from the experience of decentralized international development initiatives worldwide such as the Women's Rights in Africa initiative. The question is not simply one of centralization versus decentralization but rather one of continuing to learn from and invent structures that will work best in the 21st century.

73. This Chinese proverb is found on the Chinese Culture website (<http://chineseculture.about.com/library/literature/blsproverb-ad.htm>).

74. In addition to their written scriptures, the Torah, Jewish people have an "Oral Torah"—a tradition explaining what the Torah means and how to interpret it. This tradition was maintained in oral form only until roughly the 2nd century CE, when the oral law was compiled and written down in a document called the Mishnah. Over the next few centuries, additional commentaries elaborating on the Mishnah were written down in Jerusalem and Babylon. These additional commentaries are known as the Gemara. The Gemara and Mishnah together are known as the Talmud, which was completed during the 5th century CE. For a more in-depth explanation, see the Judaism 101 website (www.jewfaq.org/torah.htm).

75. Thomas Kuhn (1922–1996) was a professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This quote is from Kuhn (1962).

76. Ian E. Wilson is the National Archivist of Canada, appointed in 1999. This quote is found on the Best Signatures website (<http://home.bi.no/fg188001/sigs.htm>).

77. In their discussion of authentic leadership, Luthans and Avolio (2003) identified confidence, or self-efficacy, as critical. Confidence is defined as “one’s belief about his or her ability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action necessary to execute a specific task within a given context” (Strajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p. 66). The challenge for people such as the members of Uniterra is that they face situations of such complexity that no one can realistically have confidence in their efficacy or success. Choosing to engage with the situation is based on the profound belief that something must be done, combined with optimism (as opposed to confidence) that one’s approach will work and confidence that oneself and others will bring to the situation the best of their skills and abilities. If people refrained from acting except in those situations where they had confidence that they could successfully “execute the specific task within the given context,” they would not act at all. Confidence in successful outcomes is beyond reasonable expectations in the complex situations faced in international development.

78. See Morgan (1993a).

79. Based on York University management professor Gareth Morgan’s use of the spider plant metaphor (Morgan, 1993b).

80. See Morgan (1993b).

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

83. The Ethiopian adage “Der biaber Anbessa Yaser” translates as “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” The translation is found on the Engender Health website (www.engenderhealth.org/ia/cbc/ethiopia-2.html) as well as on the African Proverbs website (<http://oneproverb.net/bwfolder/africanbw.html>).

84. A major challenge for Uniterra, as it identifies the internal minimum specifications that will guide it, is to continue to adapt to the rules of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the current primary funder of the initiative. In Canada, as in other countries, receiving public funding means following a lot of rules. CIDA is no exception. A current, perhaps transitional, challenge for Uniterra is to reconcile the rule-based requirements involved in accepting funding from CIDA with the more flexible framework of minimum specifications (min-specs).

85. For a discussion of min-specs and their uses in complex organizations, see Zimmerman and colleagues (1998).

86. These questions are based on appreciative inquiry and were constructed with the advice of David Cooperrider (personal communication, September 2004).

87. See Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 181).

88. See “Vicious Poverty” (2001).

89. *Ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*

91. The situation in Nepal is as described by Kabita Bhattarai, the Harvard University-educated Nepalese Uniterra representative to the global meeting.

92. The discussion of wicked problems and wicked questions is based on the work of Brenda Zimmerman. See Zimmerman and colleagues (1998).

93. For a discussion of the uses of complexity theory for addressing the HIV/AIDS situation in Brazil, see Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002). Also see Begun, Zimmerman, and Dooley (2003).

94. For a summary by Zimmerman describing the use of wicked questions, see www.plexusinstitute.org/edgeware/archive/think/main_aides5.html.

95. Based on Zimmerman's conceptualization of wicked questions; see Zimmerman and colleagues (1998) and web page on wicked questions (www.plexusinstitute.org/edgeware/archive/think/main_aides5.html).

96. Shona proverb from Zimbabwe, as cited on the Bulawayo website (www.bulawayo1872.com/aw/shona.htm).

97. Proverb of the people of Niger contributed by the Uniterra representatives to the global meeting from Niger.

98. CIDA here stands for Community and Individual Development Association. For further information, see the CIDA University City Campus website (www.cida.co.za). For background on Taddy Blecher, see Aarup and Raufflet (2003).

99. See Friedman (2002).

100. See "'Ubuntu' University Lifts Off" (2002).

101. See the CIDA University City Campus website (www.cida.co.za).

102. See "'Ubuntu' University Lifts Off" (2002). The month referred to is October 2001.

103. The exact saying, "The sun does not rise for one man alone," has been altered to render it inclusive of both women and men in today's vernacular.

104. "Within organizational behavior, scholars define deviance as intentional behavior that significantly departs from norms (i.e., shared understandings or expected ways of doing things)," stated Robinson and Bennett (1995). Historically, most discussions of deviance have focused on negative behavior (Warren, 2003). However, positive deviance exists and was recently defined as "intentional behaviors that depart from the norms of a referent group in honorable ways" (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003, p. 209). For in-depth discussions of positive deviance and its use in creating extraordinary organizations and outcomes, see Spreitzer and Sonenshein (2003) and Dorsey (2000).

105. See Davie (2001).

106. Private conversation with Taddy Blecher in Gaborone, Botswana, October 7, 2004.

107. Private conversation with a South African executive in New York City, October 21, 2004.

108. See Lindow (2004).

109. The original Emerson quote, "We judge a man's wisdom by his hope," has been altered to render it non-gender specific. The original wisdom saying is found on the World of Inspiration website (www.worldofinspiration.com/Quotes.aspx?pg=1&category=5).

110. Quote from poet David Whyte. See Whyte (1994, p. 147).

111. Proverb of the people of Kenya, as found in Duncan (1994).

112. Vietnam.

113. Burkina Faso.

114. Malawi.

115. Niger.

116. Botswana. ("In many ways, Botswana symbolizes the tremendous challenge that HIV/AIDS poses to African development in the 21st century. It is blessed with sizable diamond reserves that have fueled rapid economic growth since independence and have raised incomes for tens of thousands of its 1.7 million citizens to world-class standards. Indeed, it is estimated that the average life expectancy of Botswana's citizens would be 74 years in the absence of HIV/AIDS, or nearly as high as the average life expectancy in the U.S. Yet the impact of HIV/AIDS, which contributes to the death of more than 25,000 Batswana every year, will likely reduce the nation's average life expectancy to 27 [years] by 2010; ("Giving Women Economic Tools," 2004).

117. Ghana.
118. Canada.
119. Guinea.
120. Mali.
121. Sri Lanka.
122. Nepal.
123. Guatemala.

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