

EPISODE 70

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:06.3] ANNOUNCER: You are listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, leadership conversations that explore adapting and thriving, in a complex world, with Rick Torseth and guests.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:20.0] RT: Hi everybody, this is Rick Torseth, and this is 10,000 Swamp Leaders. This is the podcast where we have conversations with individuals who have made decisions to lead on very difficult, challenging, messy, wicked, or what I call Swamp Issue kinds of problems, and today, for those of you who are regular listeners and I know there are quite a few of you, you will recognize my guest.

It's Benjamin Taylor back for his third conversation with us. Benjamin, nobody has made it to three here so far, so I don't know if you're noble strong or what. I'm just glad you're here. So, welcome to the podcast.

[0:00:55.1] BT: Thank you, I really appreciate it. I'm truly honored to be back for the third time, and also feel persistence. I think it's only fair that we let listeners know that we've – this is not our first attempt to record this, and we've been ill-fated every time. So, thank you very much for, I think, going through the swamp with me as they say.

[0:01:14.5] RT: No worries, no worries, I think I got to feel a good vibe in 2025 for us here. All right, so let's get started here, you recently posted a piece on LinkedIn and in Medium that caught my attention because you were making some distinctions around positive and negative dynamics of differentiation and integration. I had to break that apart from my own understanding because I hadn't really given much thought to differentiation and integration to begin with, much less, the consequences, pro-con to that.

So, I thought, we should get together and talk about it because I'm pretty clear after reading your piece that this is a play in organizations and teams and people who work and that's the world you and I live in. So, I thought that you were – you could bring some distinctions here that might help people navigate that world. So, let's begin at the beginning. What is differentiation and integration in the context that you are using it?

[0:02:05.6] BT: Right, thanks for it. So, it's not math, and it's interesting. I have put together this kind of sort of thinking from a bunch of people who really inspired me, from Stafford Beer's management cybernetics, from Barry Oshry's power and systems work, and from Sandra Janoff's work with groups and group dynamics, following on from Yvonne Agazarian, who is a kind of a group thinker.

So, the two simple dynamics, differentiation is splitting up, separating, going different ways, specializing, all of those kind of things, and that's what Barry and some of his writing calls a power dynamic. The negative side of differentiation is that you can get into a Schismogenesis, the creation of difference and the amplification of difference and separation and conflict and silos and all those kind of things.

People often overlook the positive side of differentiation, but of course, it's critical in society, in life. It's a differentiation of roles, of different expertise, of different capabilities, of different functions, and professions and of different – just the different, you know, cultures and social groups, and so on. So, that's the differentiation dynamic. Then, the integration dynamic, which Barry calls it, the dynamic of love, is coming together.

Unification, working nicely together, being as one, or simply being able to adapt effectively and work with and use each other's strengths. So, that sounds entirely like a good thing and that's why we often get into this differentiation, bad integration, good kind of mindset. That's very limiting and the downside of integration is a group think to brittleness, to external influences. It's about, you know, stultifying oneness and similarity.

And you might already get a bit of a hint that these are very interesting kind of dynamics, where if you take integration, group think, being, you know, simply all the same to its ultimate extreme, then as soon as another comes along, another team, another business, another part of the

business, another country, another culture, they will be intense than other, then you'll get very strong differentiation.

So, there is this fantastic Greek word that's used in psychotherapy, "Enantiodromia," which means, "Something becoming its opposite." So, these are – just these two are really interesting dynamics and it's really important when you're thinking about anything in organizational life to understand that they both have a positive and they both have a negative.

[0:04:52.9] RT: And it's safe to say that just by the nature of an organization, getting to a place where they have a bunch of people that they need to get the work done, the differentiation and integration are present, and you're also going to be speaking to the potency that is available if you purposefully attend to it, rather than let it happen by chance.

[0:05:12.8] BT: That's right. Absolutely so. So, any organization to succeed, needs what I call a zestful balance after Barry, of differentiation and integration coming in two flavors that no doubt we'll get to in due course. My friend and colleague, Ivo Velichkov, has written a fantastic book, *Essential Balances*, which goes into a few more of these balances but the core, the heart of organization is to effectively differentiation to be able to do different things, to explore different things, and to have different possibilities, and balance that with effective integrations, to be able to work together, to be able to have an overarching purpose, and indeed, you know, a sense of identity as a whole.

[0:05:58.7] RT: Right. In your writing, you established this distinction that you're doing for listeners right now, and then you go one step further and you talk about that there are four dynamics of play inside these two elements. So, why don't you put those in place, and then we can go off from there?

[0:06:15.6] BT: Fantastic. So, if you imagine this as a four-way balance, it's not quadrants, because that's important to say but I'm trying to give you a picture of kind of four blocks on the screen. So, top left is segment, okay? So, that is a differentiation, that is dividing people into groups based on skills, interests, backgrounds, the developed, diverse, specialized capabilities. The top right is the most directly balancing integration.

So, blend compliments segmenting. So, blending is coming together to break bread, share knowledge, learning, and experience, understand our commonalities, and overlaps. If I take you down bottom left, we've got empower, okay? So, that's a differentiation dynamic but very much at the individual level, and to use their unique skills, perspectives, develop their unique talents and abilities, bring what's special about them to the game.

So, the most directly balancing thing to empower is the bottom right, which is harmonize, which is the integration dynamic of bringing everyone together to work towards a common goal, unifying, and aligning efforts around a shared mission and purpose. So, segment, separate teams, separate dynamics, blend, working well together, empower, individuals bringing their whole selves to play, harmonize, everyone's seeing themselves as a bit of the bigger picture.

[0:07:43.7] RT: Okay, and in your writing if my understanding is accurate from the read I did, is this the space where you were referring to deep flow states?

[0:07:53.4] BT: So, there's a huge opportunity in organization and in facilitation and organization that a team, an organization, and even a cultural level to make sure that there's this beautiful flow and cadence and dynamic across these four. So, the thing is that this is not a way of sort of thinking diagnostically, "Which of these four boxes are we in?"

You actually need to be sort of taking the pulse of the organization, and for each of these four energies, you need to be saying, "Is it too high, too low, or just about right?" And looking at how they all four, balance with each other, does that make sense?

[0:08:36.7] RT: It does, and I'm imagining people who are listening who work in organizations, they're managers or leaders, they are tasked with getting work done through people, listening to this and saying, "Okay, but how do I use it?" Where you know, deep flow states, energy, et cetera. So, let's begin to think about the implementation of these distinctions for the benefit of people who are trying to get work done. So, what you're experience and why does it matter that they should get some grip on this?

[0:09:07.4] BT: Well, as I say, you know, you were talking about this a little bit differently, you know, in a workshop dynamics or in a kind of team, an organization, or more of a kind of cultural level, which one do you want us to have a – have a bite at first?

[0:09:18.4] RT: Well, let's start with the differentiation and the segmentation, and I say that just because it's the upper left, it's the first thing I drew on my paper but also, organizations tend to be segmented based on workflow or functionality, et cetera. So, that's my loose logic for starting there.

[0:09:34.0] BT: Yeah, great. So, the thing to look out for is that the ultimate extension of segmentation is to for fare. It's an explosive dynamic, a separate, you know, that separation, which is good for functionality, for capabilities, for different spaces coexisting. Well, it falls down when they can't coexist anymore when you push things out separately too far. So, what you will want to look out for there is if there's too much of the segmentation, you've got people seeing other groups as the end of me, as the blockers, as getting in the way, and so on.

And the answer to that is to bring in, as a regular, ideally as a kind of ritual, a pattern of the organization, much more of the blend dynamic to counteract it, where you've got people really kind of, you're inviting people into each other's spaces, you're showing, you're creating powerful conversations across silos, where people are saying, "It really annoys me when you do that," and you might get a response.

"Yeah, but why do you do that in that way? Because it really annoys us as well." You know, you actually, you actually want the opportunity to focus on sharing the commonalities, the overlaps, the way we work together. Barry makes a really good point that breaking bread is very foundational to this. So, eat a meal together, you know, have rituals that involve actually coming together and being the guests and the hosts of each other.

But just to balance that, just to go into that blending dynamic, if you've got an organization where there's not clarity of separation of roles and tasks and so on, if you've got an organization where everyone is trying to do everything, everybody's falling over each other all the time. You've heard me before, in a different context, talk about this idea of schoolyard soccer, where the ball's in one corner of the playground and all 22 players are there around the ball, right?

Everyone's seeing everybody else's business, then you've got too much blending going on and you need to do some clarity, some separation out. You need to bring in more of the segment dynamic, right? So, that's how those two directly kind of balance off against each other, does that make sense in context?

[0:11:51.4] RT: It does make sense, so let's say I had the other two pieces in play here and then we can bounce around amongst them. So, then you've got – that's differentiation. Integration is the next starting point.

[0:12:01.7] BT: So, the – what I just gave you was talking about how the differentiation of segmentation, the integration of blend to balance each other off.

[0:12:11.2] RT: Oh, okay, got it. Got it.

[0:12:12.7] BT: So, the next step is empowerment and harmonization, how they balance each other off, right? So, if you've got too much empowerment, too much individually focused organization, then it's every person for themselves, right? It's one of those cutthroat, competitive passengers leaving a sinking ship kind of dynamic, and the way to balance that is harmonization, focusing on what's our commonality, what's the unifying thing that will align us, what's our shared mission and purpose, and so on, right?

So, if you've got an organization where it's too much every person for themselves, you need to bring in a much more of that harmonized dynamic. On the other hand, if you got too much groupthink, too much of kind of bog thing going on, not enough differentiation, then you want to balance that with more of the empowerment, more focusing on what's different about us as individuals, what's the rich diversity that we bring in here.

What are our different capabilities and are we actually by pretending that we're all exactly the same and identical and trying to force us all to think in exactly the same way? Are we deadening some of that individuality, so should we be empowering the individual more? It's a kind of juicy balance, really, and I talked about how these things pair off and most obviously, kind of balance each other.

So, segmenting, separation pairs off with blending those different teams working better together. Empowerment and individualization pairs off with harmonization, seeing the bigger picture but there are dynamics between all of these that can be productive as well as you see what I mean. So, if you're breaking people into separate segments and separate teams, the harmonization dynamic of seeing that we're all part of a bigger thing is also useful, right?

And sometimes, you need to go from the segmentation dynamic, where you've got these teams almost conflicting with each other because they're so separate into the individual empowerment to show that the individuals are actually being a little bit squashed in those teams and that maybe some individuals in, you know, the engineering team, actually really understand what the quality control people are talking about.

And you're bringing that individual judgment back in, like giving people freedom of thought and action that breaks the group thing that comes with the segmentation because segmentation is just a group mind thing being applied at a different level. Does that make sense?

[0:14:41.0] RT: It does, and the question coming up for me is to what extent is the nature of the work that the entity or the organization is designed to deliver a factor that predisposes a bias towards some of these, meaning is there a difference between being in the manufacturing business, where you're making stuff and you got stuff coming in and going out, and you're in the service business.

I know you do a lot of work in local government in United Kingdom, and most of that work is served as delivery work among human beings getting the work done. So, to what degree does that come into play, and then how so, if it does?

[0:15:17.3] BT: Yeah, I mean, there are predispositions in – I would even pick out the professionalism of the different approaches if you see what I mean. So, you will absolutely find that people who have a strong professional identity. So, particularly, obviously, lawyers spring to mind but also people who are in the UK managing our revenues and benefits system, people who are surveyors and professional planners, and so on.

They tend to be very strong and potentially rigid in their segment, right? They've got some institutional, professional boundaries around what they do. So, only I can do this and this is right across public services but it's extremely common in some aspects of every business, right? So, they've got that institutional backing to segment themselves off separately and defend their territory, partly for some very good reasons, right?

Because you only want a civil engineer to sign off on the engineering for a bridge. So, there is that and the nature of the work is very important as well. So, this just kind of have a double dose of differentiation dynamic because they have the segmentation where they are professionals and they're, you know, properly trained, licensed to do their work but often, their work, depending on the nature of the thing they're working on, tends to be quite individualist.

It's them individually on the line just as it is with doctors, in a medical context, for making their professional judgment. So, people like engineers, lawyers, doctors tend to get very much into that differentiation dynamic, where they're segmented off because of their profession and their practice and they're individualized, individually empowered because you know, one of them has to make the decision that's against their license and against their professional reputation and so on.

So, in those cases, you have to pay a lot more attention to the blending and the harmonization and making sure that they're really playing a part in the bigger picture, and it's quite interestingly the case. A lot of people who are focused on new ways of working on you know, human development, human dynamics, social justice, and so on, can quite easily get trapped on the other side, where for them, the blending, the harmonization, the commonality, the recognizing what's important to us all, what's common about us all can really dominate.

And then, they lose some of that individualization, some of that breaking down into specialisms and we saw it, you know, all of the people who like myself, quite naively chase kind of teal, self-organized teams and organizations fell foul of some version of that, where you try to introduce kind of flat hierarchies without recognizing the need to differentiate some roles and some capabilities, and those kind of things. So yeah, absolutely, that has a big influence.

[0:18:18.6] RT: So, a listener who is a manager wants to be more mindful of this and begin to attend to it for the potency that it has to unleash more coordinated work. So, this is your part of your job, to help them, A, understand this like we're talking about here and then B, build the capacities to be able to do that in a more responsive, quick fashion. So, what's your point of view about how people go about actually developing themselves with more skill to deal with this dynamic?

[0:18:49.4] BT: Good question. I mean, I'm aware that even talking about four things as we have been doing today is quite hard to do in an oral medium on a podcast. So, you might want to stop off at my post, which I'm sure you can link to in the show notes just to get those four dynamics and their relationship in front of you, and there is a little table there for diagnosis, right?

And the shortcut way to pick up, trying to diagnose, thinking about how people are seeing their identity more of the time, right? If people are seeing their identity more as being, "I'm a part of my group or my profession or my task orientation," that's usually an indication that there's a strong dynamic of segmentation going on, right? If people are seeing themselves as an expert, dancing well with other groups, that's the indication there's a strong blend dynamic going on.

If people are seeing themselves as the main character, as a special snowflake, as you know, a personal identity, then there's a strong empowerment dynamic going on, and if people are seeing themselves as part of a bigger mission, a bigger picture, there's a strong harmonize going on. That will kind of be a good way to guide you in thinking, which are strong, and all those could be positive, right?

You actually want people to be quite strong in all four of those but flowing in between them but if they get stuck, that's when you get into the negative side, into the imbalance, into the problems, and you want to start thinking about, "Right, what's the way that we can start to rebalance this?" By bringing people together or separating them, by using the differentiation and integration kind of flows, by bringing in team meetings, all hands meetings, different ways of briefing, different ways of maybe structuring some of the task allocation.

There's a lot you can do in organizations around this but essentially, if you got too little of a dynamic, you want more. If you got too much of a dynamic, you want to calm it down a bit, and if there's an imbalance, you want to balance it with the opposite dynamic.

[0:20:52.4] RT: And so, I will post the documents that you mentioned here because I agree with you. I think, A, we're talking about it and you do a nice job with the visual portrayal of this mapping. I think it also is a useful resource to have in hand because I think part of what you're speaking to is those people who have influence on that ideally would be able to pull themselves out of the fray if you will.

And observe what's going on and do a diagnosis as an observer of the system rather than being a player all the time in the system and then go back in with these ideas, which you got, and make some adjustments, fair enough?

[0:21:28.7] BT: No, that's right. You know, to use the language of that I believe leadership, I am assuming a balcony view, and that is not an easy thing to do is it when you're in it.

[0:21:36.2] RT: Right.

[0:21:37.5] BT: So, you need to be able to get yourself up on the balcony but you can think about this for yourself as well. You know, how much am I like, "This is my team and those bastards over there aren't doing this." How much am I thinking, "Oh, I am compensating and balancing with other groups." How much are you thinking about yourself as the individual? How much are you thinking about the bigger mission?

So, that's a start, that's a bit of personal insight that you can bring to it if that makes sense. When we get to do this in organizations, we sometimes do a weight map where we're basically getting people to identify how strong are they in each of the four areas, whereas the alternative to that is a rhythm map, kind of trying to look at the flows between the spaces, how often is that happening because what you don't want to do is have everybody in an incredibly individualistic, incredibly team silo focus thing for kind of 364 days of the year.

And then do it one day away day where it's all kind of like, "This is the big mission, this is the big vision, and this is how we all play nicely together," because you know, it will be worth doing in those circumstances but it might backfire, and anyway, it is going to be insufficient. You need to bring these things in with a cadence, with a plan.

[0:22:46.8] RT: It's a useful distinction you're making. So, let's tease it out just to touch more. My sense of what you're saying is that in order to get good at this, you have to build a practice, meaning you have to give yourself multiple opportunities over time to run experiments, try things, have successes, have failures, learn from a good feedback, etcetera.

If that's accurate as a strategy, what's your recommendation for some specifics that might be included in that practice that they would use so that they weren't doing – they're more engaged other than the one day away in their practice?

[0:23:24.0] BT: Yeah, so I've kind of got a go-to little list for each of these four dynamics. I won't run through them all now but if you need more of that segmentation, then you want to group people based on expertise and purpose. You might have skills development focus around those capabilities that are in the subgroups, you might have team or departmental meetings, mentorship, communities of practice, professions, leadership, and so on.

If on the other hand, you want to have more focus on the blending, you might want to do luncheons, then sprang back lunches learning, and sharing things together. All organization development events, special short-term projects, or a standard where every project team is blended from all the different specialisms. Cross-functional teams are a really good idea here but you have to be careful that you're not just replicating the pattern of the separate teams all coming together and then having the same kind of fights at the same level.

So, you know group appreciation, actually getting people to – one of the great things we did in one of the organizations I was in was a fair, where everybody hosted a little stall explaining what their team did. Everybody else could come and visit and actually understand. It sounds kind of quite cheesy but actually just to see, hear a day in the life of what the other teams do is a really powerful blending dynamic.

So, empowerment dynamics for the individual that's quite advocated in organizations, we're not necessarily good at it but all the stuff around coaching, mentoring, 360 feedback, employee recognition as individuals not as teams, that focuses the dynamics on the people, personal development plans, training programs, and harmonizing strategy work on the what and why whole organization celebrations, all-hands meetings, rewarding overall contributions, community service that reflects the mission and values of the organization.

But essentially, you know, while we're doing this together, you know, what's the value of us all coming together in this organization? That's what you want to be doing for the harmonization dynamic. So, these are set of practices that will bring in each of those dynamics, with a little word of warning that if you do an all-hands meeting in an incredibly individualist culture, and it just becomes an opportunity for people to try and show off and position themselves in a power dynamic, then it's going to rebound on you a little bit.

So, how you do these things unfortunately is just as important as doing them if that makes sense.

[0:25:55.5] RT: It does. We'll post all this stuff, the resources, tools, and processes that you got in the show notes, and I want to go back to a comment you made at the outset, where you identified the people who are influencing you in this idea, in this premise. I am aware of these people, I know some of them, and you know them better but they have made a meaningful contribution in the life of organizations being able to work better together.

And you're pretty much a scholar of some of that work. So, I think it would be useful for people to understand your perspective on who are some of these people and why some of our listeners might want to find out in more detail who they are and how they might be able to use their resources for the betterment of their work if that's okay.

[0:26:40.3] BT: I'd love to do that, absolutely.

[0:26:42.0] RT: Let's start with Barry Oshry. I'll just say Barry Oshry and you take it from there, who is Barry and why does he matter?

[0:26:47.8] BT: So, Barry and his partner in life and work, Karen, Barry started as an experiential training designer, and in doing experiential training and national teaching laboratories, he started to observe predictable and reliable patterns of human relations in organization, particularly in a culture, an organization simulation. They ran these two simulations for many, many years observing and building on them.

So, he's a true theorist and that he observes what happens, then he creates hypotheses. He is always clear that this is human system, so it's not always, not every time but there are some patterns that repeat with great regularity and predictability. His work is very rich, very worth exploring experientially if you can because that is the way it was designed, and he exactly has these four dynamics.

He calls them slightly different words, he calls the power dynamics differentiated and individuated movement, and the love dynamics homogenized, and integrated dynamics but – and then he uses that word, you know, pursuing each of them fully and zestfully. So, Barry has been a fantastic thinker about you know, human dynamics in organizations, and that I think he's somehow underappreciated in the literature.

You know, he is well-respected, you know deep, there's no doubt about that but I think he deserves a bigger place kind of in the systems pantheon but his concepts is – at the core of it is that you have a robust system if you're balancing differentiation, homogenization, individuation, and integration because you can continue to work and continue to survive going forward in a complex environment.

But when you meet the other when you meet a different culture, a different team, and so on, you can study and appreciate it from a place of sort of security and adaptability rather than being brittle and frail and defending against it in a very sterile and possibly destructive way.

[0:28:52.6] RT: I would throw in my experience with [Darius 0:28:54.3], he really wants human beings to realize more of who they can be, and he has a nice way of delivering those ideas to people. He's really an outstanding human being. Stafford Beers, who is Stafford Beers, less known than Barry Oshry, I think.

[0:29:10.9] BT: Stafford Beer, singular.

[0:29:12.3] RT: Beer, yeah.

[0:29:13.1] BT: And sometimes if you Google him, you will get the Stafford Beer Festival, which has nothing to do with him but it's just a festival of beer in the town of Stafford in England. So, Anthony Stafford Beer was a British, Barry is very American, Stafford, very British but he ended up in Canada, he is somebody who realized through his operations research work. He was originally – well, he was a product of the British class system.

He went out to India as a colonial officer, although unlike most of the colonial officers, he got very into yoga and this was a long time ago that kind of you know, studied what the Indians believed. So, then he got into operations research and organizational improvement, realized at the time of the dawning of cybernetics that he was a management cybernetician, which is a field he kind of went on to found really.

His main famous and useful contribution is the viable systems model. There is a great summary that I quote of some of his work by one of his disciples, Barry Clemson, is called cybernetics and new management tool. This is from 1984 and in that, there's a very nice summary of the four dynamics. So, Beer says that viable systems are those that balance the four dynamics. If you have too much autonomy of organizational units, you lose your overall purpose.

But you need autonomy of organizational units to go out and do stuff in the world. If you have too much integration, you lose flexibility and initiative but if you don't have any integration at all, you haven't got an organization. Too much stability means that you just become obsolete overnight but too rapid adaptation means you have chaos and inefficiency. So, the balance there, which I absolutely match into Barry's that's why I saw fit to rename them myself is adaptation and stability and balancing autonomy and integration.

[0:31:09.3] RT: Okay, and then Sandra Janoff, and I think maybe she and Yvonne are somewhat connected here so maybe that's a combo introduction to people.

[0:31:18.4] BT: That's right, that's right, yeah, yeah. Well, so, and maybe I should stop being shy about this but I do feel that I have studied Barry and then Beer's work very directly. Anybody who's been around organizational development and change would have picked up some of the ideas of Sandra Janoff. She is one of the founders of Future Search with Marvin Weisbord, and so that in itself was a huge contribution to organizational thinking and potential.

But particularly picking up on the work of Yvonne Agazarian, who was one of the original group dynamic thinkers coming from a therapy background kind of a Gestalt background, Sandra is brilliant as you've experienced that interplay of the two core dynamics of differentiation and integration in groups, particularly in meetings, in facilitated workshops and so on but this is a core group dynamic, and the interesting thing is that part of this theory is the importance of functional subgroups.

So, a lot of this is fighting against the honest desire of the facilitator or the boss to have everybody come out in agreement so there can be an overfocus on integration dynamics, and what that could mean is not just group think and not just pushing people you know, into a consensus but that very important dissenting voices aren't heard. One of the things you sometimes hear in Gestalt group dynamics is this idea that if people are speaking up, they're speaking up on behalf of the system.

It's a little bit woo-woo but it's quite a useful thing to have in mind. So, to bring this to a point, one of the things that Sandra really encourages facilitators to do and by extension, leaders in a group, to really listen to dissenting different perspectives, differentiating voices, and when they speak up to make sure that they are reinforced and validated as a different point of view, not necessarily is correct but as, "Well, this is worth listening to."

So, Sandra really encourages the facilitator to if somebody says, "Ooh, I am not quite comfortable with the direction we're going," or gives a hint of that and you can help to pull it out of them, then you can say, "Who else has some sympathy with this perspective?" and form a functional subgroup around that dissent, and allow that group to go off and have its own discussion about their different idea of direction or perspective and so on, while the rest of the group maybe explore what might be valid in it, what might come up from that group.

By doing that thinking in functional subgroups, you can integrate the two groups back together again, bringing in the wisdom whether it's a complete change of direction or just a bit of nuance, a bit of better information, better planning, and so on that that objection was holding. So, the dynamic there is very much focused on distinguishing, classifying, and then harmonizing, and then going through the cycle time and time again if you see what I mean.

And so, you know, making sure that you're hearing all the different perspectives and all the different voices without isolating, without ostracizing, and without shutting them up most importantly, and then integrating, harmonizing, bringing it all together without orchestrating it, forcing it, centralizing it.

[0:34:42.7] RT: All right, so as we come to the end here, what is it about all of this that I didn't ask you that you want into this conversation?

[0:34:51.6] BT: The last two times that we've recorded you've asked me a really difficult question, how would we use this work to help bring about better alignment with the kind of current cultural schism that we're seeing in the USA and I've squirmed with that question every time and as a result, I've been thinking about it every since. I thought I don't think my answer has fundamentally changed but I think the importance of it is fairly significant.

[0:35:17.5] RT: Well, it's good timing because we're two weeks out from seeing real action here, so let's have it.

[0:35:22.3] BT: Yeah, yeah. So, I mean, I think that I'm going to use a piece of work from the sense of creative leadership, which is about boundary-spanning leadership and it was published quite a few years ago and I've kind of used it ever since. So, they effectively have six steps that assume that you are bringing together too high or two or more highly differentiated sets of people, right?

So, this is – I use this in systems leadership, place-based working, system change in mergers, disputes, or just where there is an excessive differentiation going on in an organization. In the first step, you really want to deepen people in their identities and validate their identities. So, I

have a colleague who does a lot of work on management of further reporting of child sexual abuse.

So, really critical thing, and a really difficult area, where you really want children to have the best experience and to be able to follow through and critical to that is bringing together all the different professions. So, in this first phase, you might have the police as they all want to do come to the meeting in uniform. You might have everybody do a bit of reflection about why they're a social worker and why they're a community health nurse, why they are a police officer, and why they are a prosecutor, whatever that is.

And share that with the group so that you are validating and understanding, giving people safety and security in their group identity, right? So, actual active listening, you know, "What do you like about Trump? Why did you go to the rallies? What inspires you in MAGA? Vice versa." So, what that is actually – and if you can get through that without surfacing the conflicts, then you might get to some reflections, some visiting each other's spaces.

And you want to make sure that you are freeing up the individual from the groupthink here, so they can say, "Yeah, don't like your whole vibe, don't like your whole group thing that you got going on here, but I do like that aspect of it, right? I like this and I like that." So, you got the reactive reflection. So, you've almost got people separated with their walls, you strengthen the walls, given their group identity.

But then, you're looking over and inviting each other into each other's space, right? And then, and this is a very kind of Janoff type of move I think, you might want to – so you've done what they call buffering, separating out, and reflecting, look into each other's world, then you want to do some connecting. So, it could be what do some of you from the opposite sides have in common? Who likes soccer ball?

No, sports ball is the expression that we want, isn't it? You know, you're actually giving people the opportunity to share something across the divide, creating separate different functional subgroups, does that make sense? So, you got people grouping around what they're interested in, and then you want to mobilize. You want to say, "Okay, so, what have you got in common around sports facilities for young people?"

What have you got in common around reducing drink driving or whatever the thing maybe if you see what I mean, and what can you find to do that's separate from your original schismatic identity that you can actually work together. If you look into the research in this, Rick, there's also good stuff in education and there's always good stuff in the ecumenical space of religion, right?

Religious people think a lot about these kind of group dynamics and how to work with them, so I'm not saying anything new here. So, you've buffered, you've reflected, you've got them connected, then you mobilize, and then you might start to weave them together. You might start to rebuild some of those subgroups that were across the boundaries into you know, new community groups, new ways of meeting together, and being together.

And that might open up the possibility to transform but you know, along that journey, six steps is too many because if you can take the first three steps then you're winning, and then you start to be in it, and a sense and response to what's happening in that kind of group dynamic. So, what I would say is focus less on – and this is going to sound really trite I'm afraid, but you know, it does work, I think, and I've just been listening to some of the kind of, more right-wing podcasts, and so on.

I think I've got a good moment where you know, they're comfortable in victory. So, you know, they're being kind of a little bit more reasonable and reflective and so on, and it's been really educative for me. So, that's what I mean, reduce the attack velocity and then improve the appreciation and the looking and the understanding and the invitation. So, it's got to be a hosting, a welcoming backwards and forward thing.

And reflect on what is actually valuable, even if it's only a tiny part of what's going on in those other people's worlds. That will allow some connections to start to form and perhaps, get out of some of the strong differentiation dynamics, and learn to work better together. We can only hope, Rick, we can only hope.

[0:40:26.3] RT: Well, I think your input's useful though. I mean, because I think people have a lot of hope but they need resources and ways in which they actually use themselves differently than the way they used it themselves to date. So, I think these resources are good.

[0:40:39.0] BT: I think the radical move is to get back to community and get back organizing. Somebody said to me recently, in connection with proposed reforms to local government in the UK, yet the local counselors don't count anymore because the national politicians have realized they don't need much of a ground game. They can win elections through social media and broad profiling and stuff that doesn't involve door knocking, doesn't involve jumble sales for fundraising, doesn't involve the local community stuff.

I think that's a huge problem and we need to get back to working with our neighbors to get rid of the graffiti and all of those kinds of things.

[0:41:15.8] RT: Benjamin Taylor, thank you very much for providing these distinctions. We will work together to get the links to the various resources that you've passed on to everybody here, including your own resources and connections for getting a hold of you if they have further questions. So, thank you again for coming to The Swamp, we made it through this thing, and I'm very pleased that we did. Good to have you.

[0:41:37.0] BT: Thanks Rick, I really appreciate it.

[END OF CONVERSATION]

[00:44:12] ANNOUNCER: Thank you for listening to 10,000 Swamp Leaders, with Rick Torseth. Please take this moment and hit subscribe to follow more leadership swamp conversations.

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