

THE ROLE OF THE INDEPENDENT PRACTITIONERS NETWORK AS A 'SYSTEMS BUSTER'

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It is my contention that the IPN network is playing a tiny but significant role in manifesting one aspect of a major paradigm shift for humanity that will bust apart the prevailing 'systems' that are presently restricting our evolutionary progress. This next step in our evolution is being facilitated by an irresistible urge to participate in a transition from our current level of consciousness into consciousness that is greatly expanded and guided by spiritual insight.

For twelve years 'being a therapist' was central to my self image and a delightful challenge. I received highly effective core training, described as 'integrative' - in reality a mix of person-centred and psychodynamic with occasional days/weekends spent exploring other approaches. Personal questionings, particularly those related to spiritual development, plus an intense shamanic training, led to a work style peculiarly my own, to my joining IPN, and eventually to giving up my 'case load'. For some years now, I have chosen to use skills and experiences gained as a therapist to facilitate working relationships - currently as initiator and co-ordinator of a housing/community project called 'From Anti to Pro-social Behaviour'

As I perceive it - through my own intuitive sensing and by processing information from external sources - this particular 'step' is a 'seven leaguer', an evolutionary rarity that will have spectacular consequences. Those who choose to take this step will contribute to the present global emphasis on 'competition' being transcended by an emphasis on co-operation as more and more of us experience 'union': of heart with mind, of body with soul, of soul with its source. The implications for 'relationships' in general - of which our external relationships with others and our environment are but a reflection of the internal relationships we experience - and more particularly for those for whom relationships are their arena of work, are manifold. An organisation such as the IPN, that is 'co-operatively enquiring' (Heron, *Co-Operative Enquiry - Research into the Human Condition* 1996) into alternative ways of relating, both internally within its membership and externally with its clients, cannot help but find itself stepping out and taking the leap of faith into the unknown required of all forerunners for such a paradigm shift.

When I refer to 'expanding' consciousness, I mean an emergent process of accelerated learning that is enabling us to begin to perceive aspects of Creation, and the role of humanity therein, that have hitherto remained hidden to the majority of us, or at least, have been scathingly shrugged off as belonging to the realms of fertile imagination or fantasy, the terrain of 'mystics' or idealists and dreamers. Some obvious examples, previously considered to be

'nonsense', but currently causing more and more individuals to question the frontiers of our present 'map of existence' include 'near death' experiences, meetings with 'angels', the use of 'remote viewing' techniques by national security and military organisations, and the possibility of contact with those 'others' commonly described as 'aliens'.

Throughout the planet individuals and 'groups' are consciously participating in this leap of faith, knowing or intuiting that humanity is on the brink of the next stage of an evolutionary 'career' that is, to all intents and purposes, 'mind-blowing'. Alongside these are those who, though less conscious of what is happening, sense the attraction of this movement and are drawn towards it despite experiencing fear and doubt.

However, there are still many who are resisting the movement for all they are worth, fearful of the collapse of old thinking, structures and procedures through which they have gained material wealth and comfort, status, power, and so they believe, security. One such example of this resistance is to be seen in the actions of some of the 'professional bodies' (what a strange title!) within the world of psychotherapy as they

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endeavor to fortify the status and security of their organizers and members by attempting to exert more and more rigid control over practitioners.

Where does the IPN fit in with all this? Two key aspects of human relationships - as complex systems of interrelating groups of living beings - are the way we facilitate learning, and the kind of structures and processes we use for decision-making. Quantum and Chaos Theories and Systems Thinking offer exciting concepts and use descriptive terminology to differentiate between a variety of relational systems. Perhaps I am being 'grandiose' in seeing IPN as a sort of prototype, an example of what are referred to in Systems Thinking as self-governing, human, purposeful soft systems ('Schumacher Briefing -Gaian Democracies', Madron & Jopling ,2003). But what really excited me when I attended the very first 'public' gathering from which IPN emerged (London 1994), and has continued to keep me involved ever since, was an immediate sense of 'something different' about the intent of the individuals gathered there. It was clear that those present were for the most part willing to buck the system in an attempt to seek and put into practice alternative working practices: more dependable methods of accrediting and monitoring practitioners, and more honorable and compassionate methods for dealing with complaints. O.K. so I'm wearing my rose-tinted specs - particularly given that the influence of the IPN is hardly wide-spread after ten years of existence! But ... maybe 'rose-tinted' spectacles are helpful when ushering in the unknown. And the general

willingness within the network to allow new ways of doing things to 'emerge' in an organic manner, has 'quantumness' about it, a desire to be in tune with the dance of Life - that I find truly heartwarming. My experience of being an IPN participant has led me to conclude that it is this 'quantumness' that fosters our ability to step into the new paradigm.

By forcing participants to stop relying upon an 'external' authority to do our thinking for us and define our ethical guidelines and codes of practice; and to stop looking to a 'group leadership' to facilitate (or enforce) our compliance with externally agreed rules and regulations, it encourages us to take cognizance of and appreciate individual integrity and the true value of learning to trust our spiritually guided inner authority. In practical terms, in order to 'get things done' within the network we have had to work more co-operatively and learn to function with a much more 'fluid' form of leadership than many of us feel comfortable with.

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The journey has not been an easy one. Indeed, it is because the network is a self-organising system that does not acknowledge any specific 'leadership' to take ultimate responsibility, that huge demands, practical and psychological, are made upon each participant. The buck stops with each one of us. The IPN is a network in which we all have the opportunity to 'be leaders' on occasion; and in the same way, those who naturally take control are discouraged from lingering too long in that position.

I have observed how difficult it has been for participants to both step out of our habituated roles - as leaders or followers, agitators or peacemakers, independent or dependent, planners and followers of the flow - and to encourage and support others to do the same. And of course some old hostilities, power struggles and suspicions remain, and new ones emerge, spoken and unspoken, as individuals struggle with the paradox of being part of an organization that aims to be non-hierarchical but that requires temporary and flexible hierarchies - in the sense of who 'has the information' and how they use it - in order to carry out the key functions that keep the network ticking over as a self-organising system. Personally I have come to the conclusion, after many years of railing against hierarchies, that what I see as 'fluid' hierarchies are a constructive and essential component of creative Life, offering every individual the chance to give and receive of accrued knowledge and wisdom. Ideally, through participating in organisations such as the

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IPN many more of us will begin to trust in the relevance of 'connecting with who we truly are' as a means not only of evaluating our work, but also of positively affecting all our relationships. And yes, you've guessed it, such a process is contagious and would eventually remove the need for 'professional' psychotherapists!

So do I believe that if the IPN format proves 'successful' we shall do ourselves out of work? Not really. I think the insane society we have engineered (and I use that term specifically) for ourselves will need the services of 'psychotherapeutic' practitioners for some time yet! However, it is within the bounds of possibility that its very success in this matter could deter from participating those practitioners who feel dependent upon there being enough people in poor psychological health to provide clients from which to earn a living - both in the sense of income and identity! Tongue in cheek? What do you think?
