

# **The Foundations and Management Applications of Principled and Constructive Communication**

## **A McGrath Systems, Inc. White Paper**

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“With any turn of a century, it is common for new possibilities to emerge, new approaches to become common practice, new philosophies of living to become popular, and new qualities of leadership to give birth to a new world.”

Robert Fritz, *The Path of Least Resistance*.



## **The Foundations and Management Applications of Principled and Constructive Communication**

Research in neuroscience, physics and systems theory, and studies done on the impact of socio-emotional dynamics in the workplace, yield a wealth of information and knowledge to guide effective management and leadership in learning organizations. The premise of this White Paper is that findings in these fields provide the theoretical underpinnings and research base for the model of principled and constructive communication developed for today's organizational leaders by Mary Jo McGrath.

### **Theoretical Background**

#### **The New Sciences and Systems Theory**

A new organic view of human organizations has emerged from advanced scientific models—the new physics, quantum theory and chaos and complexity theories—as articulated by Margaret Wheatley, Danah Zohar, Dee Hock and others. Findings in a worldview first explored by Einstein and later by the formation of the quantum theory in physics, have moved us beyond a linear view of the universe to a new, more complex and integrated explanation of how people and organizations work together.

The new science tells us that we live in a world that is always subjective and shaped by our interactions with it. Nothing happens in a vacuum. We are always in relationship to other people and events. Organizational theorist Margaret Wheatley states: “Quantum physicists are discovering that the world is a world of relationships, a world of energy and information constantly interacting with and changing one another. Nothing happens in the quantum world without something encountering something else. Nothing is independent of the relationships that occur.....This is a world of process, not a world of things.”

Up until the present time, most organizations have been built on ideas derived from seventeenth century Newtonian physics and based on cherished assumptions that this is a

world of mechanical, clock-like operations, a world of leveraging things through hierarchies and rigid organization. But through the new sciences, we are being challenged to reshape our fundamental worldview. What we are discovering is that this is not a world of things; but it is a world of relationships.

Current systems for leading and managing personnel are based on the old, Newtonian, linear worldview and resemble an industrial model aimed at assembly line production with the outcome being an object—“good performance.” The assumption is that performance is predictable and the whole system benefits most when each individual attends to his separate functions. In this model, the relationships within the whole are less important than individual performance.

While the linear model works well for mechanical or closed systems in which input equals output, it is not effective for living systems made up of human beings. Human beings are not linear, but are complex and unpredictable in their design. Human beings operate best in living or open systems that allow for outside influences and extenuating circumstances. These systems may appear disorderly, even chaotic. However, any true understanding or growth for human beings requires an open system.

Managing change in an open system requires a different structure of organization than the industrial model. Open systems do not grow and build incrementally step by step, but proceed unpredictably by the coming together of multiple events or circumstances. Growth happens in an open system when the whole system moves forward, as opposed to individuals progressing in isolation, unrelated and disconnected from each other.

Open systems bring a new challenge for organizational management, because in their disorderliness, they appear to be more difficult to control than the orderly, linear systems. But open systems have a built-in, self-organizing component that emerges naturally when guided appropriately. According to the quantum view, chaos and disorder in a system don't necessarily lead to a loss of control, but can actually be sources of order that are self-controlling in ways human beings can influence and guide.

Wheatley points to the direction leaders must take in the future and the guidance they must provide: “To live in a quantum world, we will need to change what we do. We

will need to stop describing tasks and instead facilitate process. We will need to become savvy about how to build relationships.”

Working within the framework of the new worldview of science, Peter M. Senge, founder and director of the Center for Organizational Learning at MIT, looks at managing organizations through the lens of systems theory in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*. The essence of systems theory thinking, he reports, lies in a shift toward seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-effect chains; toward seeing whole processes of change rather than isolated parts. For managers, this means a shift in perspective — away from traditional linear, cause-effect management, in which performance is measured by the ability to fulfill expectations and extenuating circumstances are ignored. Today’s manager puts his/her attention on the many intricacies of human relationships both within and without the workplace and monitors overall improvement systematically.

In summary, the confluence of new science and organizational development theory gives us a new model that says: Organizations are living, constantly evolving, self-organizing systems rather than “machines” with people as component parts. Relationships — how people deal with each other — become paramount in the open systems that characterize today’s human organizations, especially public agencies, because it is through relationships that the individual parts bring about any growth and evolution. How organizational leaders, managers and administrators communicate to support, supervise and discipline employees, and how employees respond to supervision, evaluation and progressive discipline are both emotional dynamics. The challenge for today’s organizational leaders is to learn to manage relationships, and with that comes the challenge to deal effectively with these human dynamics and emotions.

### Socio-Emotional Impact in the Workplace

The impact of emotions in the workplace has been studied by Daniel Goleman in his book, *Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace*. Goleman drew on his widespread access to business leaders around the world, as well as studies conducted in more than 500 organizations, to determine what characteristics distinguish high performers in the

workplace. He found that the higher up the leadership ladder a person goes, the more vital all aspects of emotional intelligence become.

Goleman defines *emotional intelligence* as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships with others.” It is the skill of emotional intelligence, not purely cognitive capacities measured by IQ, that promises success in the workplace, both for employees and leaders.

In his earlier work, *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman established the link between learning and the emotions by presenting the latest neuroscientific discoveries about the brain. Due to the proximity of neurological structures that govern the two capacities, emotional states can enhance or impede learning and growth. Fear and distrust can impact learning negatively, while trust, optimism and respect can make a positive difference. It follows that work environments that foster trust and minimize fear will be more likely to be places where people grow and improve.

### **Research Implications and Applications for the McGrath SUCCEED System**

Considering the impact of socio-emotional factors on learning and growth, any management approach that intended to focus on relationships would have to bring those factors into the mix. Current management approaches for supervision and evaluation in public agencies tend to be more suitable for industrial, linear model organizations. These management approaches ignore the fundamentals of managing relationships and do not allow for the unpredictability of human dynamics.

The McGrath SUCCEED System, based on principled and constructive communication, offers an alternative. SUCCEED takes into account both socio-emotional needs in the workplace and the challenges and opportunities of managing people within an open organizational system.

In many public agencies today, there is a climate of fear around the increasing demands of accountability. Professor Chris Argyris of the Harvard Graduate School of Business and Education, describes the current climate when he states: “Many professionals

have extremely brittle personalities. When faced with a situation they cannot immediately handle, they tend to fall apart.”

The source of this brittleness is a fear of failure on the part of the professional, a universal reaction Argyris found in his study of more than 6,000 people. To defend against this fear and avoid vulnerability, risk, embarrassment and the appearance of incompetence, Argyris found that people will apply four main strategies. They will (1) remain in unilateral control, (2) maximize winning and minimize losing, (3) suppress negative feelings and (4) be as rational as possible while doing all of the above.

Professionals — including organizational leaders — operating out of any of these strategies will fall short in their capacity to manage relationships and deal with people’s emotions. In fact, they will most likely skip the area of human dynamics that usually brings up emotions — the fear of failure — and attempt to provide supervision and support through observation and feedback while ignoring that fear. The result is a disaster for any feedback system and explains the typical climate in many organizations where under-performing staff remain employed without sufficient support or improvement. Unfortunately, most frontline supervisors, middle managers and even many executives have had neither the tools nor training to do otherwise.

The McGrath SUCCEED System, including the McGrath FICA and the McGrath Template, provides today’s organizational leaders with a structure for communication that addresses the whole person — their emotional needs as well as their professional needs. Based on sound human relations principles and practices, SUCCEED allows managers to communicate effectively with teachers and staff — meeting both the human need to reduce fear and powerlessness and the human need to feel fulfilled and empowered at work. (See Graphic #1 on page 7.)

The McGrath SUCCEED System facilitates the process of growth through principled and constructive communication. It is ideally suited for employee supervision and evaluation in the open, non-linear systems that learning organizations really are.

Grounded in human relations principles including trust, respect, cooperation and growth, the FICA Dynamic operates at the center of the SUCCEED System for communication. FICA gives organizational leaders a schematic for translating human

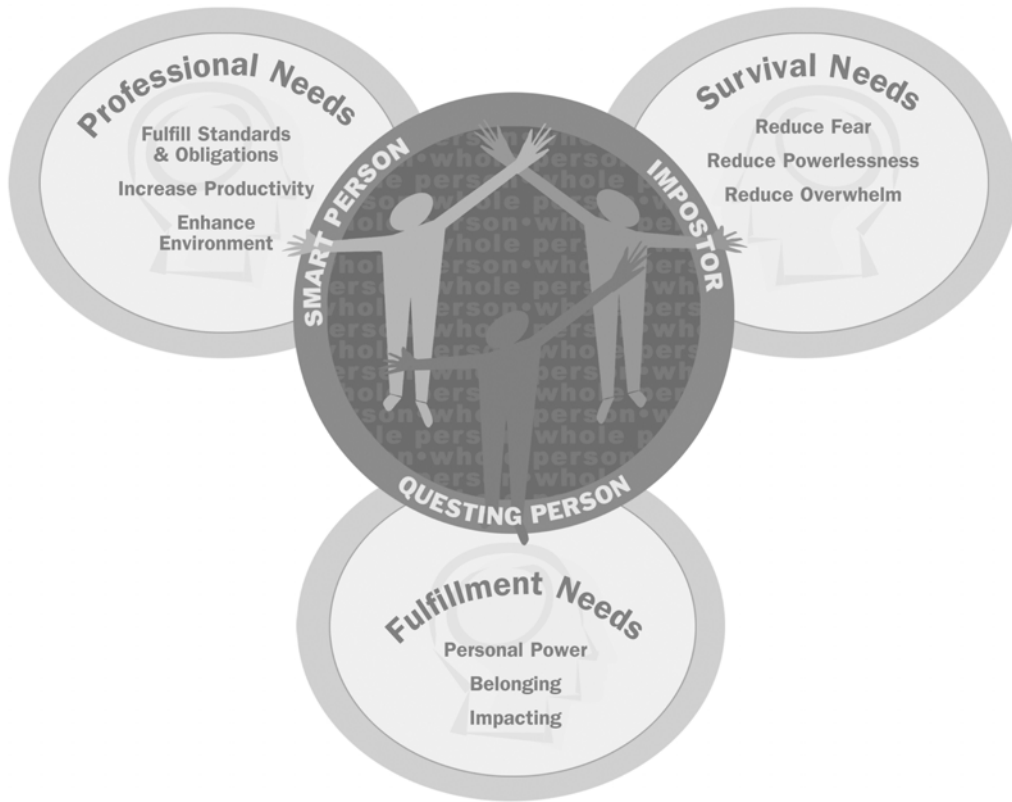
relations principles into sound practices. Inherent to the FICA Dynamic are organizing principles that account for the chaos and disorder of dealing with human beings. (See Graphic #2 on page 8.)

When managers use principled and constructive communication with their employees, they build **trust**, cultivate **respect**, generate **cooperation** and foster **growth**.



# The McGrath “Whole Person” Model

*A leader operating as if there is only one set of needs is missing at least two-thirds of a person.*



3•10

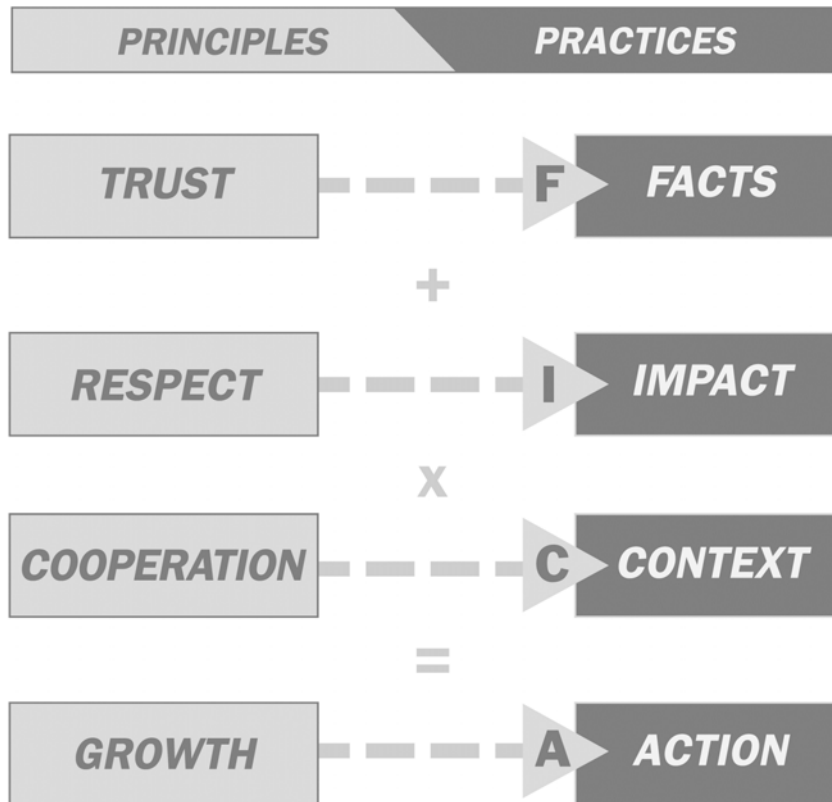
*Lead with S.U.C.C.E.E.D.* – Copyright 1983-2002 Mary Jo McGrath. All Rights Reserved.

Graphic #1 (From *McGrath Lead with SUCCEED*, p. 3•10.)





## The FICA Dynamic



Graphic #2 (From *McGrath Lead with SUCCEED*, p. 5•21.)

They take into account all four of these elements in a non-linear fashion. *Content* — the facts and impact of employee behavior — and *context* — the circumstances inside of which the employee is operating — are weighed together and balanced before any action is planned. The unpredictable human issues and interrelationships involved in the situation being discussed are all accounted for and the growth and development of the whole person (as well as the whole learning organization) is fully supported.

What the McGrath FICA does is to break up the business-as-usual mindset deeply entrenched in our public agencies and institutions and to bring forth a new paradigm. When their communication is consistently structured in the FICA format, organizational leaders truly develop their personnel. Evolution occurs. A new generation of growth and learning emerges, one that naturally leads to and causes a leap to the next generation of growth, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The McGrath SUCCEED System provides logic and certainty to supervisors and managers as they approach issues and related communications on all matters. They find themselves engaging in arenas that they've previously avoided due to fear and other negative emotions. SUCCEED is a non-linear system that accounts for the chaotic effect of the context within which events occur and people perform. SUCCEED is a unique training and development program that provides both a reliable structure and the freedom to create. SUCCEED guides the supervisor to grapple with the reality of life and its inherent unpredictability and messiness, while designing and empowering the future through principled and constructive communication.

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