

Chapter VIII

Partnership Language and Media: Creating a New IT Culture

OBJECTIVES

This chapter aims to help you understand the following:

- The core characteristics of a partnership social system that most closely relate to language and media as social institutions.
- How to apply the values of a partnership society to recreate language as a social institution (especially styles of communication).
- A new vision for partnership media.

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter IV, I discussed how language operates as a social institution to teach us the values, attitudes, and beliefs of our society. Our dominator legacy is deeply embedded in the language we use and the ways we have learned to communicate. Since language acts as such a powerful social institution, it is also a great place to begin to create a partnership culture. “We need a language that connects us to the heart of our human experience—our values, dreams, desires, and needs” (Hart, 2004, p. 115). We need language that liberates us from the limiting either/or perspectives of a dominator culture and inspires the unlimited both/and perspectives of a partnership culture. We need language (and styles of communication) that

help us focus on the ways in which we are connected as human beings, more than the ways in which we are different (which serves the dominator values of ranking human beings).

In Chapter V, I discussed how media teach us the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a dominator culture via the persistent use of stereotypical images and messages. To create the climate for partnership in IT, we need new representations of women and people of color in relation to technology in books, magazines, television, film, and advertising. We need to break free of the “geek” stereotype and show more complex human beings portrayed as developers, users, and beneficiaries of technology. We need to move outside of a narrow Amerocentric lens regarding the ways in which we think about and envision technology and its uses.

Creating this kind of change may seem daunting, but it need not be. People often resist participating in change because they see society as a rigid mechanism that’s “always been this way” or “just the way things are.” However, we need to shift away from this dominator view of society as a machine in which people are “expendable cogs” (Eisler & Loye, 1990, p. 185); this attitude contributes to a lack of responsibility towards being part of the change. “If we deny our power to affect people, then we don’t have to worry about taking responsibility for how we use it or, more significant, how we don’t” (Johnson, 2006, p. 133). The truth is that individuals *interact* with the larger social institutions, and those social institutions can be changed by that interaction. To create a partnership society, you must adopt the view of society as a living organism that you are co-creating with others. This will make it easier to claim responsibility for your part in reifying our dominator system or moving towards partnership.

This chapter offers ideas for how we might create the conditions that encourage caring relations in language, communication, and media as social institutions. However, the ideas that I offer here are just that—ideas. As Riane Eisler (2002) wisely said, “I’m not going to preach that we should be more caring. I’m always going to focus on what I have learned about *creating the conditions that encourage rather than inhibit or prevent caring relations*” (p. 83). This chapter explores the following ideas for how we can co-create the conditions that encourage partnership: (1) identifying core components of a partnership culture that are particularly relevant to language and media; (2) developing partnership language and communication by understanding the cultural components of voice and silence, focusing on linkages in relationships in IT, practicing dialogic process, and practicing nonviolent communication; and (3) offering an example of new partnership media—*connect!* magazine.

In Chapter I, I contrasted the characteristics of dominator and partnership social systems. Table 1 describes the characteristics of partnership social systems that are particularly relevant to language and media as social institutions as they relate to

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