Relationship Systems Intelligence™ Transforming the Face of Leadership

A White Paper Written By

Marita Fridjhon MSW, PCC, ORSCC
Anne Rød MA, MCC, ORSCC
Faith Fuller PhD, PCC, ORSCC

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Relationship Systems Intelligence™ is an advanced and courageous way of approaching leadership and team interactions. The development of RSI™ within a team or organizational system accelerates collaboration and supports the creative thinking needed to face the challenges of this millennium. In the same way that Emotional Intelligence equips individuals to master their internal life, and Social Intelligence engenders empathy, RSI enables leaders and teams to tap into the true potential of human beings' collective intelligence and creative powers.

The basic principle of RSI is the redirection of focus from the individuals within the system, to the whole system as an entity in itself. This shift in focus enables Leaders, teams and organizations to move beyond personal concerns and petty conflicts to a positive and generative group identity. The strength of a team's identity provides resilience and the resources necessary to navigate the constantly changing challenges organizations face.

Why Relationship Systems Intelligence™ Is Needed Now

Being a leader in today's complex world bears little resemblance to leadership of the past. The pace is faster, the stakes higher and the scope greater. Global business operations are carried out across continents, time zones and cultures. One of the causal factors speeding change is the degree of connectivity. Modern technology has changed relationships on a global scale overnight. Currently everybody and everything is part of a virtual, real-time network shrinking time, space and distance.

A performance-driven, top-down leadership paradigm is no longer sufficiently quick and nimble to compete. The pressure to innovate and create added value is constant. The amount and complexity of knowledge that an organization must hold, manage and leverage is simultaneously growing at an explosive pace. Leaders need a new paradigm that can offer the speed and scale required to adapt and thrive in the face of constant change.

Adding to the external dynamics impinging on organizations, a transformation is taking place from the inside as the next generation of workers, the Millennials, are making their mark and comprising a majority of the workforce. Digital natives accustomed to nearly constant connectivity and feedback, they are forcing previous generations to rethink how they will lead teams and organizations.

Mass collaboration, seeking diversity and having an innovation-focus are no longer merely competitive advantages. They have become a matter of survival for organizations. In this environment, 21st Century International Skills[1] become key factors, preparing and enabling the upcoming generations for success and organizations for transformation. The through-lines of these skills are: systems thinking, working creatively together, collaboration across diversity and acting with the larger community in mind[2]. Subsequent generations will (and some have already) adopt a new mindset shifting their focus from "my needs" to "what the world needs." In simpler terms shifting from egocentrism to ecocentrism.

Given that, we require a new leadership model that moves beyond the paradigm where everything starts and stops with the leader only. No one person can know enough or do enough to lead a team this way. We need to explore ways leaders can engage with their teams for maximum efficacy and lead at the speed of change.

A Definition of Relationship Systems Intelligence™

Relationship Systems Intelligence™ (RSI™) is the ability to reinterpret an individual's own experience (and that of others), as an expression of the system. The experience is both personal *and* belongs to the system. RSI is the next evolution in the Intelligence field. In comparison to Emotional Intelligence (knowing me) and Social Intelligence (knowing you and me), RSI focuses on the relationship entity that exists among the humans in that system (knowing "it" or the relationship itself).

By accepting the existence, presence and intelligence of the human system[3] as a unique entity, attention is shifted from the individuals in a group to the system as a whole. As the individuals in the human system express themselves, they become voices of the team or organization to which they belong. Statements once perceived as personal opinions, are now viewed as information about the system's needs and state-of-being.

By listening to all the voices we can become sensitive and alert to the dynamics within and around the team environment. And if we listen *very* carefully, we can access the wisdom and information that is held by the Team Entity[4] itself. Sometimes this information is different and separate from what is experienced by individual team members. The awareness of that new information changes the team. Through repeated exposure to this emerging awareness, the Team Entity becomes conscious and sentient. Those leaders with a high degree of RSI, can have a relationship with the Team Entity as well as the individuals on the team, enabling them to better navigate emerging currents. This RSI principle moves leaders from working with aggregates of individuals to a holistic systems approach.

The Research That Paves the Way

Relationship Systems Intelligence™ (RSI) is the brainchild of Marita Fridjhon and Faith Fuller and its application in leadership settings spearheaded by Anne Rød (all of CRR Global, USA). It emerges from a web of contemporary research in leadership, intelligence and systems theory (among other schools of thought). It is currently being leveraged in coaching and consulting engagements and leadership development in organizations across the world. Thousands of executives, managers and team leaders have trained or been impacted by Organization and Relationship Systems work. This experience has shaped the concepts in addition to the following research:

- o **Senge's Systems Theory** introduced the concept of systems thinking to organizations. Enabling individuals to see their part in the puzzle, creating awareness and encouraging responsibility outside of one's own realm. Senge maintains that understanding the systemic nature of life awakens individuals to something greater[5].

- o **Goleman's work on Emotional and Social Intelligence** in which he maintains that there are three qualities a leader needs. The ability to interpret and manage one's own emotions in ways that are beneficial for different situations. The capacity to read other's feelings and respond to them[6]. (This involves having an intuitive sense of how the social world works.) And seeing the big picture and having a solid grasp of it.

- o **Collective Intelligence**. The recent research of Malone and Woolley at MIT, Harvard reveals the importance of social sensitivity and how this capacity allows for increased levels of contribution in a team system. By "hearing all the voices" (an RSI principle) and allowing the collective to create solutions, a team increases its Collective Intelligence and enhances overall team performance[7].

- o **Positivity Research by Losada and Heaphy** identified several factors that contribute to increased positivity in teams. These were shared responsibility, turn taking, enquiry for the whole rather than only self-advocacy, creating an equal focus on self and other[8]. An atmosphere of buoyancy broadened people's creative thinking and action repertoire creating a strong effect on overall performance[9].

- o **Agazarian's Theory of Living Human Systems and Systems Centered Models** explores how roles can be swapped and changed within a system, linking roles to the goal of the context. In other words, we need to examine how roles can alter from one context to the next depending on the functions that need to be fulfilled[10].

- o **Systems Intelligence**, in which Saarinen points to the capacity and potential of interactive humans systems, where we are all contributing agents instead of isolated individuals. Embedded in this is the optimism for change combined with the potential power of each moment. This allows for the sharing of knowledge, harnessing the collective intelligence and enabling the system to proactively create its future and opportunities[11].

    "*A system is a generative frame within which a subject experiences her life as taking place. The system moves, pushes, restricts conditions, encourages, suggests, seduces, and commands: it seems to have a will and voice of its own. There is no full knowing exactly what it is. Life is moved, pushed, restricted, conditioned, encouraged and commanded by systems: that is the existential set-up of my life as it takes place.*" ~ Saarinen[12]

- o **Arnold Mindell's Process Work** has enabled us to operationalize collective intelligence through the unfolding of signals within the relationship system. He also pioneered the concept and expression of Deep Democracy through

his Deep Democracy Process work[13].

The Five Principles of Relationship Systems Intelligence™

To develop and apply both Collective and Systems Intelligence in teams and organizations we need to access and apply Relationship Systems Intelligence™. RSI has five key principles which shape what we believe, how we engage, and the "place from which we come." Leaders who can embrace and live these principles are better able to harness their team's power.

Principle #1 Each Relationship System has its own Unique Entity

Every relationship system forms its own powerful identity, known as the Relationship (or Team) Entity. The concept of a separate Relationship Entity, with its own characteristics, is what sets RSI apart from Social or Emotional Intelligence.

As soon as two or more people come together, a Relationship Entity is created, intentionally or not. The Relationship Entity is the web of connectivity and interdependence among the individuals within the relationship system. It weaves in the uniqueness of each person to create a distinctive system with its own identity and dynamic. The Relationship Entity has a presence with a voice and intelligence of its own, needs and wants, able to interact with and impact its environment. It is a resilient energetic force that individuals in a relationship system can lean into and find strength in. Relationship Entities exist in every type of system: couples, families, teams and organizations.

Principle #2 Every Member of a Relationship System Is a Voice of the System

Every member of the system is an information carrier and Voice of the System (VOS). This principle is firmly grounded in the definition of RSI that invites the reinterpretation of the personal as an expression of the whole. In addition, it advocates for the practice of Deep Democracy; the belief that the only way to navigate team and organizational realities is to hear all the voices, even the unpopular ones. Deep Democracy is a practice which facilitates the full expression of the team (Arnold Mindell).

Think of the team as a puzzle where every member is a piece. To reveal the picture of the overall team experience every piece is needed. Each team member has critical information about the functioning of the team. The information may be transmitted through verbal and non-verbal signals, as well as through the behaviors and actions of the individuals within the team. Having high RSI also means that team members are open to an expression of a range of voices because they know it is the system speaking. They are agile in reinterpreting their personal experiences as systemic expressions; whatever happens within their relationship system is not just personal but also a voice of their team.

As the Collective Intelligence research indicates, the more input acquired from others, the more informed a team will be in its decision-making. While Deep Democracy means that all voices need to be heard, not every voice is equal. Organizations do have hierarchies and realistically the voice of the

CEO probably has more influence than that of his/her administrative assistant. Similarly a team making an IT decision will give more credence to the opinion of the technical experts. Once team members learn to listen to the voices of the system, including that of the Team Entity, they understand the power of alignment. This makes it possible for them to lean into the system's inherent strength and collective wisdom.

Principle #3 Relationship Systems Are Naturally Intelligent, Generative and Creative

This principle allows us to view change and disturbance of any kind as an ally, while trusting the Team Entity's resourcefulness to find its own answers. Conflict and chaos are seen as signals and messages by the Team Entity to co-create from rather than react to something new that is trying to happen.

The more RSI a team has, the more collectively intelligent, generative and creative it can be, paving the way for increased performance. These Relationship System qualities remain present regardless of circumstances, even in disturbance and breakdown (like downsizing or going out of business). Teams and organizational systems have natural life cycles, with a beginning, middle and end. When we understand and accept this natural order it is easier to let go of one stage and allow another one to begin.

The acceptance and inclusion of this principle allows the team members to lean into the Team Entity and trust its inherent creativity and intelligence. This transforms the team culture, enhances results, and increases positivity.

Principle #4 Relationship Systems Rely on Roles for their Organization and Execution of functions. Roles belong to the system, not to the individuals that inhabit the system

This principle requires the biggest mental shift in teaming and leadership focus as it asserts that every team member has the responsibility to hold a leadership role on behalf of the system.

Every relationship system has its own functional and emotional needs that must be fulfilled through roles. Without assigned roles, the system can't function. These roles may be "outer roles" like CEO, IT Manager, and Intern or "inner roles" like peacekeeper, pot-stirrer, and visionary. The outer roles fulfill structural functions needed for the relationship system's survival while inner roles satisfy its emotional needs. It's important for Leaders to identify which roles exist, both inner and outer. If a person holding an inner role leaves the team, someone else will inadvertently pick up and fulfill that role because the system needs it. Being aware of this dynamic empowers a team to staff differently and select new team members based on inner roles as well as outer roles.

These roles belong to the relationship system, not necessarily to the individuals that inhabit them. How one person embodies a role can be very different from how another person embodies that same role. Personal history, psychology, work style, maturity, etc. all impact how skilfully each individual inhabits that role.

While Leadership is typically a designated outer role on a team (manager, director, VP), we hold that Leadership is also an inner role that belongs to the whole system. This can pose challenges for traditional leadership with hierarchical control structures of resources and power. New technology and a new generation of workers who are used to shared influence and immediate connectivity, means that leadership with its corresponding power needs to be looked at in a new way.

Principle #5 Relationship Systems Are In a Constant State of Emergence, always in the process of expressing their potential

This principle is critical to the phenomenon referred to as the speed of change. It signifies modern society's increasingly shorter planning horizons and the required flexibility to embrace and navigate change effectively. Successful organizations are nimble and flexible in the face of shifting tides.

Most people are averse to change because they are afraid of the unknown or of losing the status quo. Even the word "change" itself often creates resistance. With RSI, the premise is to accept change as constant, natural and inevitable and to co-create with and from it. Leaders need to move away from the traditional unfreeze-change-freeze paradigm and encourage teams to embrace change as a natural and continuous evolution necessary for survival.

Changes can be minute or comprehensive. Sometimes the changes come from outside, other times from within. The need for change can surface through subtle or explicit signals, indicating that something new is emerging. In a team these signals may be expressed through opposing views, or even conflicts. It is not the disagreement itself that constitutes a problem, but the style in which it occurs.

Constructive conflict provides creative heat, clears away obstacles and provides opportunity for growth. Toxic conflict styles can tear teams apart. Where there is high RSI disagreements or conflicts are not considered a problem, but are held as signals that change is needed. It is no longer about "who is doing what to whom", but focus is shifted to "what is trying to happen in our system". In so doing the attention is on co-creating from what is emerging rather than reacting to a perceived attack.

What Relationship Systems Intelligence™ Offers the Field

Navigate Change Better

Because Relationship Systems Intelligence™ takes a systemic view of all human interaction, it enables the team members to see themselves as part of a larger system, creating an impact and being impacted on in a dynamic, interconnected flow. It combines a higher view which enables us to leave judgment behind while leaning into the Team Entity and accessing its potential. The appreciation that all impacts are emotional ones reinforces the need for sophisticated competencies and skills in leadership and communication. RSI equips us to navigate the tides of change and human interactions more effectively and skillfully, and with greater benefit to the team systems we are part of. The result is high performance teams.

Optimize Team Potential

The capacity that will make the biggest difference in a team's effectiveness is the leader's ability to relate to the team as a whole system rather than a group of individuals. In order to develop a high performing team, a leader and his/her team need to become aware, responsive, accountable, intentional and co-responsible for the dynamics of the team system. The leader will shift his/her focus from leading multiple team members on a 1:1 basis to leading the team as a system. The leader knows that he/she is also part of the team. By accessing information and wisdom from the Team Entity, a different collective intelligence is available, capable of transforming a team's potential.

Fast Track Development

For teams and organizations to operate successfully we must move away from the traditional top-down management model to more distributed forms of leadership. RSI enables distribution of the leadership role throughout the team/organization, evening out the load, removing bottlenecks and avoiding leader burnout. This fortifies the feeling of common goals and helps draw upon the various skills available in the team. Because it distributes leadership it is a fast track to leadership development in the organization.

Increase Trust

Teams with high RSI show an elevated level of interconnectedness that leads to a higher level of trust. This in turn enables the team to create new and better ways of working together. It stimulates inspiration, positivity and innovation. RSI enables teams to use conflict in a constructive manner, harnessing the creative potential of diversity while paving the way for emerging change. Trust and interconnectedness are created through meaningful and honest dialogue, which can only be had when fear is absent. It is cemented by trusting the positive intentions of one's colleagues and intentionally looking for these. Teams with a high level of trust are more likely to become top performers.

Create a New Mental Model for Success

Relationship Systems Intelligence is a framework which leverages the interdependent relationships among team members to support the collective potential of the team. The development of RSI in a team system accelerates its creativity, connection and performance leaving it with the edge needed to succeed in today's dynamic business environment. It helps equip leaders, teams and organizations with a mental model and mindset to access the raw potential in a team allowing its inherent intelligence and creativity to emerge.

About CRR Global

CRR Global has been creating excellence in relationships of all kinds for 15 years and our mission is to "inspire and equip change agents who work with relationship systems." Our flagship professional coach

training program, Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching (ORSC), offers cutting edge training and tools for coaches and consultants globally. ORSC Certified Blue Ribbon coaches and consultants participate with CRR Global to deliver coaching, consulting, in-house training and design to organizations internationally.

About the Authors

Faith Fuller PhD, PCC, ORSCC and Marita Fridjhon MSW, PCC, ORSCC are co-founders of CRR Global, Inc. and authors of the Organization and Relationship Systems Coaching™ Program. They have over thirty years experience working with relationship systems including teams, organizations, families, and community groups. Their training program is designed to foster excellence in relationships of all kinds.

Anne Rød BA, MA, MCC, ORSCC, is an intercultural management consultant and executive team coach. She is a sought after speaker and has published several papers on Relationship Systems Intelligence and team development. Anne Rød is senior faculty with CRR Global and delivers the program worldwide.

Notes

1. 21st Century International Skills spearheaded by ATC12S. What started as a global network of 250 researchers across 60 institutions has become a global movement

2. ATC125 four groups of skills

   a. Ways of thinking. Creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making and learning

   b. Ways of working. Communication and collaboration

   c. Tools for working. Information and communications technology (ICT) and information literacy

   d. Skills for living in the world. Citizenship, life and career, personal and social responsibility

3. Definition: "A human system is a group of interdependent people with a common focus, identity or function such as working in a team or organization."

4. Team (or Relationship) Entity is a separate entity that exists among the individuals within the relationship system.

5. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004

6. Goleman, 1998

7. Woolley et al , Science Magazine 2010, MIT Center for Collective Intelligence

8. Losada, Heaphy 2004

9. Fredrickson 1998

10. Agazarian & Gantt 2000

11. Hämäläinen & Saarinen, 2007; Hämäläinen & Saarinen, 2010

12. Saarinen & Hämäläinen, 2004

13. Arnold Mindell, Process Work Center, Portland Oregon

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