



Men-Women: an update. Drs. Dieuwke Begemann

To understand why an update in our thinking about the relationship between women and men is as important as it is, we first need to see how deeply this relationship has influenced society. We can see it most clearly in the way masculine and feminine values influence behavior in the workplace and the home.



Many of the problems we deal with, have their root in a lack of balance between masculine and feminine values, but are not perceived that way. So for instance, when in my work as consultant I ask people what they worry about most in their working environment, they respond by defining their concerns about structure and intent: too much stress on efficiency, too much work process rationalization and an excess of *short-term* profit for the few. Managers question how long they can keep asking their employees to work inside a process engineered purely in minutes elapsed, employees feel they have lost touch with their professional selves, customers detest the call centers with which they're forced to deal, no one really expects to be able to get the home care which will inevitably be needed and, on a deeper level, we feel that our time is running out in a way that's utterly unique in human history, and simply frightening.

And when I ask next where these problems come from, a singular, wide-ranging answer makes itself visible: we have been dealing with a predominance of masculine values, as rationality, efficiency, goal-driven process and an implicit respect for autonomy.

Once the actual outlines of the problem have come into view, the potential for change becomes less complex, less overwhelming, and more susceptible to human solution.



Simply enough, we need more empathy, more time for connection, more understanding of the need for *long-term* thinking, sustainability, the conscious creation of creative space for employees. Looking at what's needed, then, we see unsurprisingly that when the problem is a preponderance of masculine values the solution will be an access to and implementation of feminine values.

There has always been a certain lack of clarity about the way an individual carries collective values like culture, or gender, but much as we're willing to agree that every individual is different, we can also agree that there are recognizable similarities between members of a given culture or gender and that while these similarities may not be present in every individual (artists, for example, tend to gravitate to different sets of values), they are significant enough for us to talk about group identity and its long-term effects.

To say that there is a significant correlation between the presence of male values in men and feminine values in women is not very controversial, in and of itself.

However, if we move to the instinctive and powerful understanding that masculine values need to be *balanced* with feminine values, and that the unique value of each lies precisely in the immediacy of their simultaneous presence and the inevitable strength of the pendulum swing between them, we then need to look to the *preservation* of this energized balance and quickly find that the answer will never be merely an increase of women in the workplace.

Balance needs a containment and, as the old symbol for Yin-Yang shows, the balance, because of the circle around it, is forced to hold.





But what we're currently dealing with is a broken circle, and the break, far from being rooted in new attitudes, or technology, dates to the beginning of the industrial revolution and the profound shifts in responsibility, time-allocation and implicit, controlling values, which in the beginning of the industrial revolution the tacit separation of men and women brought.

Previous to the upheaval, male and female qualities had been contained in the system called *the couple*, and this was an economic entity behind the functioning of a farm, or any small enterprise. Women and men had different tasks and roles within that system, but both were responsible for the work and for raising the children, and in the early years it was still this controlling unit that applied for the new work in the new factories. The gradual realization that the work was too harsh for children and women, and that protective laws were necessary, sent them back into the home and rendered *work*, and *home* different places as men and women started to spend considerable times apart with a concomitant, diminished responsibility for the full spectrum of family needs. Unsurprisingly enough, the consequences of this separation were not foreseen - how lonely the women might get, how the absence of a father might shape a child's identity, what the long-term effects would be of a boy learning that his future will involve a separation from women and that becoming a man essentially means doing with less warmth, less intimacy.

Women had to begin to learn to have control and power in terms of how the house looked and functioned. And, more importantly, how to deal with the fact that the control and instruction of the children had largely become their job.

The workplace, on the other hand, became dominated by masculine values: functionality, efficiency (short-term), and



rationalization. Our recent financial crisis itself came from this dominance of masculine values: short-term profit and new ways to make money from money became dominant over notions of sustainability and care.

It's also true that when the workplace became dominated by functionalism, a concern for beauty became irrelevant. No rosebushes were planted against the factory fence, and beauty came to be thought of as appropriate to the home so that we suddenly couldn't spend enough beautifying our homes, while in the outside world we were met with the uninteresting, undistinguished facades of the factories, and the commercial offices.

Great sociologists such as Max Weber and Jurgen Habermas had written extensively about the rationalization of society and its underlying reality, that rationalizing diminished the importance of values to decision-making when compared to rational goals and means.

Consider the free press: we all value the free press as key to the continued existence of democratic governments. But the papers have to make a profit, and to meet the need for profit we've seen a steady merging and buying-out of papers that has left few independent and trustworthy as implicit guardians of politicians and the possibilities of corruption.

While the rationalization of the workplace and society didn't escape the notice of Weber and Habermas, they missed the deeper truth. The process started with the separation between men and women.

Now is the time that we need to heal that separation and close the circle by providing new forms which contains both male and female energies and values. So an update in our thinking about the way men and women relate is long, long



overdue.

For this update, I'll invoke a perspective on change from System Theory. In brief, System Theory is a relatively new branch in the sciences which allows for a broader perspective than individual disciplines because it considers human beings, cultures, countries, planets, universes, from the relatively calm perspective that comes with seeing them all as systems and behaving as such, predictably and coherently.

What can system theory say about the relationship between men and women?

First of all, we consider the relationship as a system. We know from this theory that when a system falls apart the parts which had been contained in it will then continue as autonomous systems, much in the way the employees of a firm which has broken down, will lose their corporate identity and fall back on their individual selves and continue as such.

Well, what was contained in the relationship between men and women, as a system?

The raising of children, sustaining labor and work, sexuality, care for the damaged and the elderly, care and protection of the dwelling place and its environment.

We can see how these have become autonomous, almost cancerous realities in our society.

Ivan Illich was the first prophet of this truth, and according to him the institutionalizing of human needs endangered the free society. According to Illich we'll inevitably have a society in which schools prevent learning, industrial food and medical care both make us ill, and urbanization replaces the idea of home.



The care of young children has become a profit-driven, privately run business and the manifest failure of that approach fills both our papers and our nightmares.

Extended education has assumed enormous proportions as a state responsibility and we can now educate our children from 3 years old to 30. To what end?

While the primary school provides some safety and a chance for a good education in the occasional presence of the occasional good teacher, the drop-out percentage for children in adolescence is more than disturbing. The culture in the schools is mostly boring, morally empty, not inspirational, and often dangerous.

The structure is industrial, the learning process broken up into separate, unconnected classes of 40 minutes where teachers are unable to keep the attention of pupils who find the internet and chat rooms infinitely more interesting. The growing gap between the highly educated and lower educated persons in western society falsifies the hope we had that led us to send children to school for so many years. On top of that research shows that children learn more, faster, *before* they go to school.

The failure is the more alarming when we realize that the economic survival of Europe is dependent on creative professionals.

Creativity in children is developed when they are alone and bored and inventing something to play with, or at. Or when they're bored in a group and need to invent their own games.

Nowadays, the children are on relentless schedules and supplied with virtual entertainment for the few free minutes between. They not only never have to invent for themselves,



or indulge their curiosity, they never have time.

Sexuality has become a profit driven project as well: everything is for sale, so much so that a columnist in the NRC (Thierry) confessed that his skills as a lover could no longer compete with the new technologies which his loved one could buy for herself.

Sexual education is redundant since everything is available to see, and this violates the invisible aspect of sexuality: the feelings, the sense of union, the occasional shimmer of transcendence. It's gotten so bad that a verb involving two people is seldom used to describe sex these days. The vocabulary has become one of consumerism: did you have sex today?

Work has expanded into the 24 hour economy which hardly allows for family life in the form of shared meals and leisure, precisely those times when children were traditionally educated by their parents in values, and behavior. Life for the parents has become so busy and stressful that the temptation to leave the children to their games and touch pads is hard to withstand. We see the results in youngsters who are simply not educated how to behave in the public place.

The upper classes escape the whip of the 24 hour economy by hiring staff, but the upbringing of their children has become a management skill (who picks up who where, how late). Parents are, in fact tired, and the number of only children is growing.

Care has also become an expensive, run-for-profit business.

While this allows for some good positions, and salaries (for some) this is at the cost of the care, and foremost, some fostering of love and patience in human beings, something



fading since we ourselves stopped taking care of family members in need. Now the costs of healthcare are growing at such an alarming rate the policymakers are looking again at the 'care by family and friends' option. But who can take on the responsibility for an elderly or sick person when there are two jobs to take of, and kids?

Which brings us to the structure of the family itself. Since men and women stopped working together, ceased being a system, marriage has become an very unstable institution. The divorce rate is growing from 1 to 3 towards 1 to 2 marriages. Without common goals and shared values in work, marriages are founded on 'good feelings.' " However "feeling good" is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a marriage to work, because no one always feels good with a partner. A marriage needs a common goal, with shared work and the likely increase in mutual understanding and respect. There are famous examples of scientists and artists of couples working together. Les Curies, Nicci French, but in the research I have done, I've felt this vocation-bound mutual respect also very strongly among the less glamorous, the teachers, the owners of small enterprises, or couples as colleagues.

These negatives around us have been clearly observed, though perhaps not yet interpreted usefully, as the side effects of the breaking of the containing circle around the Yin and Yang energies.

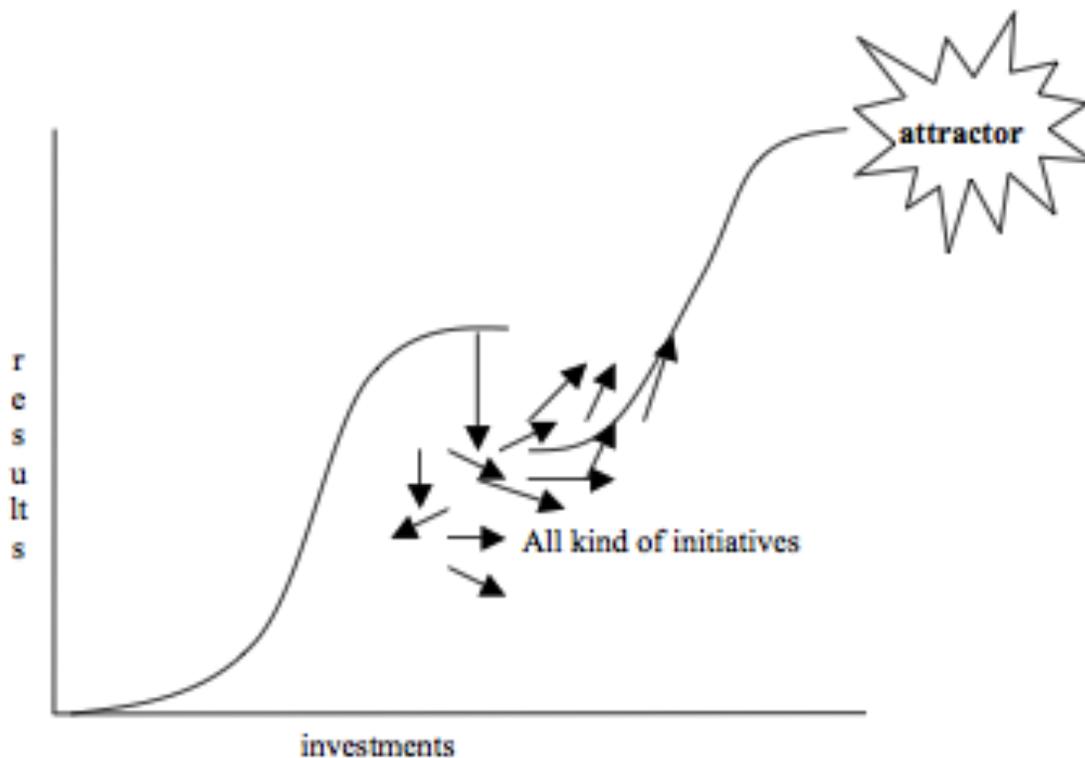
It is clear that what the world needs is empathy, sustainability, long-term thinking, trust, care and, above all, beauty. It is also clear these are feminine values. The future is in the hands of western women, according to the Dalai Lama - however, we cannot improve the world without our men. To balance the overkill of rationality, functionality,



short-term thinking and short-term profit taking (shareholder values), with these feminine values, the circle must be closed again. It is simply simpleminded to expect this from women alone as happened to some degree when women were given the vote and entered the workplace again (when the hard physical labor was replaced with manual and mental labor). A balance must be created by boundaries. Every gardener knows this.

There is another reason why we need to do that now: our society is in a transition time and we need again system theory to see why this transition needs shared leadership men women. System theory begins with the premise that every system has a life-cycle and that changes are part of that cycle, c.q. the end of one or the beginning of another.

The life cycle is presented in the so-called S-Curve





When the curve does come to its end, a chaotic period is induced in which different kinds of energies appear. There's the enthusiasm that comes with new, often scattered beginnings. On a personal level, this is what our souls need and call for when we feel we've seen and done it all and need to do something new, and re-emerge elsewhere.

At this time in our part of the world there are a number of new beginnings. Cooperation instead of competition between business is becoming a new way to profit, which is at the bottom of the successful tv-series Borgen, where broadcasting companies brought their meager budgets together to create something really good. New values create new ways of hiring and motivating employees with culture as Zappo does; new technologies enable individuals to generate and share energy.

These new beginnings become part of a coherent vision at some time. There are the computer simulations of random input that show that in a cloud of scattered points a vague shape begins to coalesce and attract other points into it. Think, for example, of the sudden emergence of the Knowledge Economy as an attractor, drawing different initiatives into a new curve with new beginnings and new values.

And there's a regressive energy, which is represented in the drawing by the interrupted line that falls back to a previous curve. The former Soviet Union is a good example of a system in which regressive energies have overpowered beginnings of Perestroika and Glasnost as initiated by Gorbachev. The curve which preceded the collective state curve is oligarchy and feudalism and that is where the regressive energies head. The regressive, former curve shows a negative face: power struggles between the new



rich, secret corruption and criminality.

Regression can also be induced by a shock, a traumatic event, much as the USA shows regressive energies since 9/11. A country in which the mainstream was individualistic, with an avant-garde rapidly turning green (the next curve), suddenly fell back to ugly, neo--conservative tribalism.

We are often shocked by this regression. In Israel now a rabbi defends the idea of a Palestinian genocide in a daily newspaper. Which seems sheer madness coming from a Jew till we consider that the first Arab attack in 1948 shocked the new immigrants back into survival mode and generated a tribal culture of *us against them*. The Yom Kippur war reinforced this regression and in a regressive curve genocide can suddenly seem to make sense, to be acceptable. Confronted with this madness we want it to stop, tell them simply to get over it, but as we learn from system theory the only effective power against regression is the development of the new curve.

In Europe we've had peace for 70 years not because we became better human beings, but because the new curve of Europe transcended the national states, which had accepted for centuries the notion of war with each other.

In other words, the most efficient way to neutralize the madness of regression is to empower the new.

We're exactly in the transition phase between the old curve of individualism and the new curve, which is about connection (a green curve in Spiral Dynamics Theory by Chris Cowan and Dom Beck, or teal as in Ken Wilber's integral theory).



The end of a curve always shows its negative face. The aftermath of the individualistic curve showed greed, and consumerism. Therefore, the new curve, though still including the individual values of personal responsibility and empowerment, will react against this negative face: connection and meaning will be the strongest values.

What does this involve in terms of leadership?

In an individualistic culture the leader had to bring success to the company by finding the new vision and strategy - in the curve of connection the model for leadership is Shared Leadership. Tony Blair used the example of flying geese - one after another will take turns flying in front - as a metaphor for the leaders of the European Union.

To transcend the old structures and beliefs of the previous traditional society, men and women had been declared equal and, for all practical purposes, *the same* in the individualistic culture. Men and women were defined in terms of their individual rights, and as women fought for economic independence, men fought for rights as a father in divorce, for right of parental leave.

Now, at the start of the new curve, these rights are still respected but there is also a growing acknowledgment of *differences* and a need for *connection in order to complement each other*.

Many immediate problems would be solved if men and women started to work together in Shared Leadership.

There is the never-solved issue of the lack of women in top positions in organizations. How much easier it would be to appoint a man and a woman together to the same position, the same responsibility, the same salary, and then appraise them on their shared results?



They could quietly find out how best to complement each other without fear of losing profile. (Of course, not every man and woman can happily work together, it will be true that as in marriage you have to look for the partner suited to you. In-company trainings programs are an ideal arena for that.)

How relatively easy it is for young parents to deal with work and parenthood when sharing the same job. I talked to a woman who had a successful trend watcher institute together with her husband. They also had four children, one who'd had a difficult disease when young. She understood full well that she would never ever have gotten from an employer, the understanding that she got from her partner in creating the flexibility to deal with her child and her work.

New developments in the workplace - like the growing number of self-employed professionals, the corporate adjustment to NEW WORK which has made working at home or anyplace else possible - point in the same direction. Things are naturally moving in the direction that makes it all easier for a couple to share work, home and children again.

How easy it is to share the burdens of the job with some who cares and understands. In all the years I facilitated curricula for Senior Executives there was one recurring theme- their loneliness due to the impossibility of sharing at home what was going on at work. Vice versa how much easier to deal with withdrawal and irritation from a partner when you know from whence it comes.

We've looked at how private life could be easier, but what would be the effect on the workplace and the society?



When women are not on their own and having to compete with men in a masculine environment and learn the games 'Mother Never Taught You,' it's much easier for them to articulate their feminine values. And in the safe confines of the boundary circle, the male will have to find a way to accommodate their wishes and preferences while managing his own priorities.

Then when in the past, human capital consisted of the skills and talents of the employees and management, nowadays, in a more complex world, the human capital of a business rests on the relations between these individual employees to share their information, insights and ideas. We need feminine values to manage those relations.

Couples sharing a job are ideal for a company, because it 's so easy for them to share and inform each other about what has been going on – much easier then for other part time workers. Education, healthcare and home care have become scattered by part-timers who are not aligned with each other.

So the key fact here is simple: *the world improves from Shared Leadership.*

Nowadays our leaders are kings without queens (apart from Holland, where king Alexander and queen Maxima are a living example of the effectiveness of a couple who complement each other).

But how would the climate crisis look like when feminine values like care and long - term thinking are introduced?

How would the trauma of the attack on Wall Street Towers been dealt with by feminine values, like healing, instead of the masculine values inherent in, “smoking them out of their



caves?" If Bush had appeared every night on television with Oprah and the victims of the attack who were being acknowledged for their wounds and thus assisted in their healing, the international consequences would have been very different from the disastrous interventions in the middle east we've had to endure, their terrible consequences.

Our planet is plagued with a cancer of the refugee camps, where only the worst is growing. An understanding about the importance of the home and meaningful daily activities would heal this. It was the woman Golda Meir who understood that the immigrants who flooded Israel in the fifties and had to be housed in camps (!), needed work and forced , all of them, professor or laborer, to go out in the morning with their tools to create the highway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

It is a universal law that we are ruled by opposites. There are as many negative as positive electric particles, and in normal times an equal number of men and women are born. Men and women need each other for the balance of opposites. The only thing needed is that men and women acknowledge that they deeply need each other. And that we begin to take the always simple steps that go in the direction of natural change, healing time passing, energy doubled in the encompassing, fruitful relaxation that comes with mutual respect and power.

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