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*EVERY MONTH **ATTRACTORS** SHARES TIPS AND TOOLS FROM HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS. IN THIS MONTH'S EDITION, GLENDA EOYANG TALKS ABOUT A SIMPLE APPROACH TO COMPLEX CHALLENGES.*

Happy New Year! 2005 was full of change for individuals, businesses, and communities from the local to the global contexts. 2006 promises to bring us all more of the same—surprising shifts in markets, competition, technology, and personal relationships.

When change is a way of life, complex problems emerge daily, and they require that we meet them with resilience and creativity. Plans can be helpful when they increase adaptability and open new options for action. Too often, though, we find ourselves locked into plans or complicated planning processes that restrict our abilities to see and respond to emerging opportunities. We need ways to respond quickly with thoughtful and effective action.

At the Institute, we use three simple questions to help us distinguish emergencies from the merely emergent, to analyze multiple factors in the moment, and to align our diverse actions toward shared goals. These questions, though simple, are deeply powerful as we shape our work together toward adaptive action.

WHAT? What do we see? What does data tell us? What are the indicators of change or stability? What cues can we capture to see changing patterns as they emerge?

SO WHAT? So, what sense can we make of emerging data? What does it mean to us in this moment and in the future? What effect are current changes likely to have on us, our clients, our extended network, and our field of inquiry and action?

NOW WHAT? What are our options? What are our resources? When and how can we act—individually or collectively—to optimize opportunities in this moment and the next?

We and our clients have used these questions to move together toward decisive action.

A social service agency faced radical changes in public policy that would have a direct effect on their clients and the resources they had available to meet clients' needs. What? So what? Now what?

A medical technology company focused on getting processes under control and ensuring lean, high quality product development and deployment procedures. What? So what? Now what?

An organization in the midst of internal transformation faced backlash from disgruntled workers. What? So what? Now what?

A group of attorneys and their support staff recognized patterns of negative attitudes and disruptive relationships that sucked their energies and distracted them from productive work. What? So what? Now what?

In each of these cases, the three questions helped leadership focus on critical options and effective actions. What emerged was not a sophisticated and complicated plan for an unknowable future. No. What did emerge was a shared understanding of emerging challenges and clear focus on actions that could shift emergencies into emergent possibilities.

In November, I presented at the Organization Development Network International Conference. I talked about how these questions and other tools from human systems dynamics could help organizations adapt to the uncertain times that are sure to come in the weeks and months ahead. You can find my remarks at our website. Go to http://www.hsdinstitute.org/dept_press_publications.asp.

Early in April, we will sponsor a two-day session: ***Introduction to Human Systems Dynamics: Seeing and Influencing Patterns***. We'll explore a variety of tools and techniques, including these three questions, to help you stay nimble and responsive in the midst of rapid and unpredictable change. For more information about the class, go to http://www.hsdinstitute.org/events_learning.asp.

We hope that 2006 brings only happy surprises to you, your team, and your organization. But even happy surprises require fast and effective insight, analysis, and action. These subtle yet powerful questions can help you make the most of the opportunities that come your way. What? So what? Now what?

Glenda H. Eoyang, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Human Systems Dynamics Institute
geoyang@hsdinstitute.org
www.hsdinstitute.org