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*SOMETHING FROM NOTHING:  
THE EX NIHILO EXPERIENCE OF THE ENTREPRENEUR*

*REFLECTIONS FOR PATTERNS*

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I have founded five organizations and been involved in a dozen other start-ups as employee or consultant. Like most challenging experiences, entrepreneurship can teach you everything you need to know to succeed. The difficulty, of course, is staying flexible enough to learn the right lessons and present enough to learn them in time! I am often struck by similarities between entrepreneurial leadership and leadership of any organization in times of change. Consider the following “entrepreneurial” questions and how you encounter them in your own leadership roles.

**Who should be involved in what?** Even if formal documents describe roles and procedures, in reality it is the day-to-day experience that shapes the functional structures of an effective organization. As an entrepreneurial leader, I must continually ask myself about who should be involved in this particular event at this particular moment, and I also have to be aware of the precedents I am establishing for the future.

**How much difference is too much difference?** It is one thing to state a mission and vision, and quite another challenge to set the conditions that make the vision a reality. Essential elements must be consistent for stability and continuity. Non-essentials must introduce variability. Diversity at the edges is critical to the healthy development of an organization. As an effective leader, I must constantly balance similarity for stability and difference for growth and change.

**How do I spend my time?** The leader is the organization’s most valuable asset in the early stages of development or change. Later, other resources accumulate that far surpass the leader’s contribution, but at the beginning, allocation of the leader’s time constitutes a major investment decision. I must establish an “investment plan” for my own time and focus.

**How hard should I push; how fast should we go?** In times of great potential—like the birth of a new institution or transformation of an existing one—divergent and convergent forces are tremendous. New opportunities push the edges of the emerging organization toward rapid growth. On the other hand, resilient infrastructure and strong relationships evolve only over time. Moment to moment, I make critical decisions about whether to push forward or build stable foundations.

For leaders in entrepreneurial or changing organizations, these questions are ever-present, but . . .

**These questions have no answers.**

Only continually creative engagement with thoughtful partners and dynamical environments keeps these questions alive and builds adaptive action in times of change and uncertainty.