

I The intellectual shaman

Think for a minute about the people who attract you most. You want to spend time with them, listen to what they have to say. If they are academics, you want to read what they have written, go listen to their talks, even take their courses. In the particular context of this book, I am thinking of academics in the various disciplines associated with management, but you could be thinking of people in any field or from your personal life – or any number of academics whose stories I did not have room to include.

These people have a light that shines out and becomes a form of what physicists might call a ‘strange attractor.’ It is a light of intellectual curiosity, a willingness to take risks, that guides them through their work and the questions they ask. It is a light that leads them to question the status quo and provide new ways of thinking or operating. It is a light that leads them to want to make the world a better place and, in the case of management academics, to do the research, thinking and theorizing, teaching, and writing that advance that desire. It is a light that enables them to see across boundaries and make connections that others have not made – and then make sense of those connections.

I am going to call these people ‘intellectual shamans.’ We all know some of them. **Intellectual shamans are scholars who become fully who they must be, and find and live their purpose, to serve the world through three capacities: healing, connecting, and sensemaking, and in the process seek or come to wisdom.** I explain these ideas in much more detail as we go along. For the moment, consider the following quotations.

Healer:

Well, ... I’m in this very privileged profession. We get to do what we love, and I think that we want to derive meaning from our work.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-08518-3 - Intellectual Shamans: Management Academics Making a Difference

Sandra Waddock

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 THE INTELLECTUAL SHAMAN

So that's the first piece. But then there's another piece where I think that it's not just about me deriving meaning, [because] I can derive meaning actually from a lot of things. But I also think that what I do in the business school and what we are doing in the business school, what we're teaching in business is just wrong. So I think the business paradigm as we know it is broken. So it's not about me deriving meaning, . . .it's our obligation. . .to create a better society. If the business paradigm is broken, then it's our obligation to provide something to fix it. *Tima Bansal*

Connector:

But there are no limits to human cooperation. [...] Because so many of the stories that we lifted up showed that perhaps business could emerge as one of the most powerful forces on the planet, I decided to [study] business as an agent of world benefit. Business as a force for peace in high-conflict zones. Business as the force for eradicating extreme poverty. Business as a force for eco-innovation. Where is it happening, what does it look like, what are the enablers, what are the ecosystems that help unleash the strengths of business and the service of our global agenda? *David Cooperrider*

Sensemaker:

Business schools get all this stuff wrong, and I think [there will be problems] until we get business right. [Business is] a deeply human enterprise. It's how we create value and trade with each other. It's how we create meaning for each other. It's how we spend a third to half our lives. Until we come to see that as a human activity full of emotion and rationality and spirituality and sexuality and connection with others, until that's in the center, not at the edge: imagine if financiers had. . .to make the human case for their theory, rather than other people having to make the economic case for theirs. I think the world would be a much better place. *R. Edward Freeman*

THE INTELLECTUAL AS SHAMAN?

Tima Bansal, David Cooperrider, and Ed Freeman are intellectual shamans, and I come back later to the contexts in which their ideas make better sense. They are three of the twenty-eight management academics interviewed for this project, although many others could also be considered intellectual shamans. Throughout this book I explore what it means to be an intellectual shaman and, by extension, to be shamanic in our modern world. Underlying this analysis is the idea that we can all, if we want and if we work at it, become shamans – intellectual or otherwise – and do our bit to help heal the world.

As the quotes above indicate, intellectual shamans are, through their work, healers, connectors, and sensemakers.¹ But there is more to it than that. They did not necessarily start their lives as shamans; these individuals have undertaken the task (some would call it the spiritual task) of finding and living out their core purpose in the world – and in doing that they are trying to help make the world a better place. Their implicit and sometimes explicit message to all of us is to do the same. They (and we, if we hope to achieve our full potential) have had to ‘fully become who they are.’ In that becoming, and in shaping their purposes, they serve the world in some important way. As *intellectual* shamans within a broadly defined management academy, they do this through the tasks of healing something intellectual or idea-based, be it theory, research, or practice; of connecting, which means mediating across boundaries or boundary-spanning; and of sensemaking. But they might be operating in any number of other realms of academia – or simply other realms.

Intellectual shamanism can be formally defined as intellectual work (theory, research, writing, and teaching) that integrates healing, connecting (intermediation or the mediating of boundaries), and sense-making to serve the greater good.

Intellectual shamanism seems to be achieved by finding and fulfilling one’s purpose in life, when that purpose is oriented toward the greater good. As I will explore in depth later, it means becoming

4 THE INTELLECTUAL SHAMAN

fully who one must be. In the course of that becoming, many (perhaps not all) intellectual shamans become wise elders – sages. Wisdom, as I define it, also has a tripartite definition: **wisdom is the integration of systems understanding, moral imagination, and aesthetic sensibility in the service of the greater good**, which in the case of intellectual shamans is reflected in their healing orientation.

Too frequently in today's frantic race to achieve whatever our profession sets up as the standard, we forget to think about what it is we were really meant to be, the work we were really meant to do that will truly inspire us or others, or what will actually be useful to the world. This state can be particularly difficult and painful for intellectuals today, as the race to achieve ever higher now readily measured numbers of publications in so-called 'top-tier' journals with high 'impact factors' (meaning that other academics cite them, not necessarily that there has been any impact in the managerial or 'real' world) intensifies. Worse, too often as intellectuals we are afraid to be willing to take the risks necessary to follow our own intellectual – and healing – paths. Yet shamans, intellectual and otherwise, if they are nothing else, are healers.

Using the stories of twenty-eight well-known management academics in a range of management disciplines, I hope to illustrate the path to the healing work of intellectual shamans. This work is much needed in today's broken world, and can, I believe, be undertaken by anyone. Here I focus on the intellectual world of management academics. The lessons we draw from the intellectual shamans profiled here apply broadly to any line of work in which there is a willingness to serve the world.¹ⁿ

SOME BACKGROUND: SHAMANS AND INTELLECTUALS IN MANAGEMENT

Very little management scholarship deals with shamanism at all, with the notable exception of two papers by Peter Frost and Carolyn Egri.^{1,2} There is, however, substantial scholarship on shamanism in the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies, among

others. Although the subjects of this book are individuals I call *intellectual* shamans because they work as academics, I believe that we all – every one of us – have the capacity to work in shamanic ways if we find our true purpose and are willing to follow it, and if it serves the world in some way, however small. As we explore the work of intellectual shamans in the chapters to follow, I hope that you can draw from their experiences some of the principles that can help you, the reader, find your own shamanic healing path. Though this book is focused on intellectual shamans, I believe that its fundamental message has much broader implications for all of us if we want to make the world a better place.

There are twenty-eight individuals represented in this book explicitly, but there are many, many more intellectual shamans in the management academy, some of whom you probably know if you too are a management academic. Of course, there are also numerous shamanic people of other types in different walks of life. For example, in looking at the work of the individuals who built the foundations of what I call the corporate responsibility infrastructure, I termed such people ‘difference-makers.’³ In her book *Edgewalkers*, Judi Neal calls people who work in corporations trying to make a positive difference, and spanning boundaries in doing so, ‘edgewalkers.’⁴ Others call people who build new things within existing enterprises ‘intrapreneurs.’^{5,6} Peter Frost and Carolyn Egri directly apply the term ‘shaman’ to organization development specialists.^{1,2} Further, many people today are talking about social entrepreneurs who serve in much the same capacity by starting up their own socially oriented enterprises.^{7–10} Sometimes such individuals are called civic entrepreneurs^{11,12} or institutional entrepreneurs.¹³ Some are artists, others psychologists, others volunteers or workers in many different areas.

Not everyone in these lines of work is shamanic, for it is the healing, connecting or boundary-spanning, and sensemaking roles, that characterize the shaman. And it is the light that shines from them that helps us identify them, even though this is hardly a scientific concept. It is clear that people with a shamanic – healing, make a

6 THE INTELLECTUAL SHAMAN

difference, or 'fix the world' – orientation go by many names. All these labels imply a willingness to take action and some degree of risk through initiating something new or healing for people, community, or the world. All imply a commitment to some purpose beyond the self. Typically, however, such work is not recognized as being shamanic, partly because in our Western culture the very idea of shamanism seems foreign, strange, and even slightly dangerous – or worse: weird, in the sense of mysterious or supernatural. Even with these connotations, it is the shamanic work of intellectual shamans – and, by implication, other types – that this book explores.

I cannot emphasize enough that there are many, many others who might have been part of this study. Some of those others refused to speak to me because of busy schedules; others I do not know. At some point, with a 'saturation' of data, I simply decided to start writing and stop obsessing about whether I could interview all the people, whom I so justly admire. My deepest apologies, therefore, if I have left you out and you would have liked to be included!

Perhaps you yourself are a healer, an edgewalker, a social entrepreneur (intrapreneur), or a difference-maker, and that is what intrigues you (assuming you are intrigued) about intellectual shamans. As my own shaman/teacher John Myerson^{14–16} says, shamans tend to recognize each other – and I believe it is because they can somehow see the 'light' within others so inspired. Shamans know this light, with its healing orientation, when they see it.

The very different lives, specialties, and work of the people in this book suggest that there is no single path to becoming an intellectual (or any other type of) shaman, as numerous indigenous shamanic traditions likewise demonstrate. But there are common threads in the stories that I heard: all the people interviewed found, in one way or another, that they had, essentially, to 'fully become who they were' and follow their own lights to making a difference in the world. They had, in more shamanic terms, to find their own power. They had to 'own' that power and use it for what Buddhists call 'right livelihood,' 'right' speech' (writing), and/or 'right action,' although few of them

might phrase it in quite this way. To follow their own paths, they needed to do the work to which they were, in a very real sense, called. Further, they needed to engage in one way or another with the three tasks that Frost and Egri have articulated as the core of shamanic work: being healers, connectors (or, in Frost and Egri's words, mediators of different realities), and sensemakers.^{1,2}

It is through this framework of finding the way to one's own power, answering the call to purpose, healing, connecting, and sense-making that we explore the path to intellectual shamanism. In doing so, we move toward what I hope is a realization that we all have the capacity to become intellectual – or other types of – shamans, depending on our own gifts, power, and callings. We 'simply' need to have the courage to answer the call to become who we really are, to work in service to something beyond ourselves that tries to make the world or something in it better, and follow that call in our life's work by doing work that matters, makes a difference. The path is there before us, but it requires a strong sense of self, as well as the courage and a willingness to take risks and follow our own instincts (and knowledge) about what work is important and why it is so. We need, in short, to allow our own light to shine.²ⁿ

Following the path of intellectual shamanism sometimes means stepping away from the accepted 'wisdom' of well-trodden paths and 'how things are done' in this field. It means finding what matters in our own lives and work – and to the world. The management scholars in the case of individuals included in this project understand this reality. Their work is more than simply getting into the right journals and getting cited by other academics. Their work means operating in a context that sometimes seems to offer little support for the maverick that many intellectual shamans find themselves to be. Their paths are sometimes risky, and risk can mean failure (though, obviously, in the case of the individuals profiled here, it has meant great success and quite a degree of acclaim). Their paths frequently mean crossing boundaries, for one characteristic of shamans that we explore later is that they 'journey' in some way to multiple realms. Their paths necessitate

8 THE INTELLECTUAL SHAMAN

putting ideas on the line with (and, in my view, this element is crucial) a healing orientation. Their paths entail a willingness to step into the light (or darkness) that new or off-the-beaten-track ideas, insights, and methods bring. And that means making sense of things that initially may seem not to make much sense.

Before going on to describe what shamanism is, I ought to confess to a set of personal motivations behind this work. First, I have long been attracted to the writings and ideas of the people I was privileged to interview. Getting to know them better through the interview process was an honor. Second, I believe that the current system of publishing and gaining reputation in management scholarship is broken, badly broken, and the words of many interviewees substantiate and elaborate this perspective (though it was not my original intention to prove this point). It was my sense, as it turns out justified, that these highly successful academics did not play the currently popular 'game of hits' – that is, of publishing only in so-called 'A'-level journals and attempting by all means to get cited by their colleagues. So finding out more about the individuals interviewed and how they experienced both work and life was an important motivation behind this work.

Obviously, of course, most intellectual shamans have had (more than) their share of notable publications and citations. But they are driven by something else: the nature of the work, a love of teaching, a desire to change the world for the better, the challenge of ideas and truth-telling as they see it – something that takes them beyond themselves and their own careers to this somewhat weird (wyrd) notion of serving the world that underlies shamanic practice. They seem, in essence, to have followed their own lights to find work that has mattered a great deal to themselves and, ultimately, to others. In following this path, many have succeeded beyond their wildest imaginings (and most exhibit a good deal of humility with respect to their successes, claiming luck or opportunity). I would argue that success came exactly because of their ability or willingness to take risks when opportunities presented themselves, to recognize the necessary

connections and follow through with them, although others might claim perhaps that their success came in spite of that risk-taking ability.

Further, in undertaking this project, I wanted to hold up these people as, in a sense, exemplars. In admiring and holding up to the light their lives and work, I want to suggest (gently, or perhaps not so gently) to other colleagues that there are (yes, sometimes risky) paths to success in doing what really matters to you, especially if it is something that serves the world. Particularly for colleagues newer to today's academic and other systems, in which progress is increasingly evaluated by readily measured quantitative indicators that may or may not reflect actual contribution, such exemplars are important. Defining academic success (or performance) only in terms of the number of publications (or, worse, 'hits') in a select set of journals and getting cited by other academics is a narrowing of goals that will ultimately prove as meaningless, empty, and hollow as when companies seek only to 'maximize shareholder wealth' without regard to any deeper sense of purpose or attempting to fill a real need.

There is another, deeply personal, motivation for this work. For years I have been reading about shamans and shamanic practice. One day, in the early 2000s, then doctoral student Jen Leigh walked into my office, saying something along the lines of: 'I think you might want to meet this person.' 'This person,' John Myerson,³ⁿ is one of the founders of the New England School of Acupuncture, a practitioner of martial arts for over forty years, a Buddhist priest, a holder of a PhD in psychology, and a 'seer,' as well as author, shamanic practitioner, and horseman. Importantly, he is a shaman trained in an African tradition, who practices a decidedly Western form of shamanism translated for the likes of someone such as me. His main goal is helping his clients find their own sources of shamanic power. Within days I was in his office asking to learn what he could teach. Eventually, this teaching (sometimes a conversation, sometimes more like therapy) resulted in a group that John calls the 'Way of Power' group, meeting monthly, in which each member of the group helps the others find his or her own source of (shamanic) power.

10 THE INTELLECTUAL SHAMAN

From John and the other members of my group (Matia Rania Angelou, Linda Thomas, and Barbara Ferri remain in the group to this day) I learned that, while each of us has different shamanic gifts, we all *do* have gifts that we can use if we are willing to take the risks of doing so. For years I had doubted that I had any gifts in the shamanic realm. Then it finally dawned on me (after much pressure from John and the rest of the group) that my ‘gift,’ such as it is, is the ability to connect ideas and insights, and to ‘see’ the linkages that might make change or insight possible. (As an aside, in the course of this training I also became a singer/songwriter/guitar player, and have released two CDs at this writing – though my music is more a gift to me than to the world!) My particular ‘gift’ of seeing connections is not always a blessing, because it can mean that I see things ‘before their time,’ and then get impatient when others are not on board. When these connections happen, I think I can seem arrogant, too quick to judge, and somewhat hard-nosed in presenting what I think or ‘see,’ as well as difficult when others do not immediately (or ever. . .) ‘see’ things the way I do. But, for what it is worth, it this capacity to connect things – along with a lot of hard work – that has been my own source of inspiration and, hopefully, shamanic work that if not in impact at least in intent is aimed at bettering the world.

From these experiences, my belief is that management (or any other type of) scholars all have the capacity to become intellectual shamans. Further, people who are not scholars can become shamanic in whatever line of work, interest, or pleasures they pursue. To do this, we need to follow our own paths to power and use that power to better something beyond ourselves. Shamans, who fundamentally are healers, help the world, societies, organizations, or individuals heal – that is, take our power and make it a gift to the world in some way.

Shamans are in some ways the consummate insiders, but often find themselves as mavericks or outsiders. So they need to be willing to be outsiders, at least some of the time, and take risks, because the shaman’s way does not necessarily follow accepted norms or paths to success. I would note that, although this approach seems on the surface