

GOLDILOCKS, PORCUPINES & CHAMELEONS – PART 1B: INNER CORE & OUTER RING CONNECTION

In our last blog we discussed the three circles that a leader operates within: the non-negotiable, unchanging inner core and his or her contextually generated attitudes, decisions and actions. The leadership challenge is to keep the inner core and outer ring operating in the “Goldilocks zone,” meaning a just right” relationship between the inner core and outer ring, with the “loose-tight” properties working in synch and harmony. Today we will take a closer look at the inner core and the outer rings of leaders.

THE INNER CORE.

The inner core is home to a leader’s essential beliefs, core values and defining convictions. It is that which gives an individual substance and a sense of self as a unique, integrated and whole person. In this sense, we could say that the inner core constitutes the “DNA” of the individual. As we will discuss later, this is also true for organizations.

The inner core is the residence of the leader’s higher purpose and the source of his or her moral conviction. As such, it serves as a criterion for decision-making, and the source of leader’s inner strength to stand firm in the face of criticism or opposition.

THE INNER CORE IS FIXED, THE CENTER OF GRAVITY FOR THE INDIVIDUAL, KEEPING A LEADER STABLE AND CENTERED DURING DIFFICULT TIMES.

It is not subject to creative reinterpretation or open to compromise. It is never “adjusted” for matters of convenience or for the sake of expediency. It serves as the individual’s ethical constant and moral compass, keeping them stable and “on target” through the headwinds and turbulence encountered in life and leadership.

THE OUTER RING.

From the outer ring, the leader functions with a finely tuned, “contextual reading system” which prompts wise, discerning and timely responses to unique individuals and changing circumstances.

THE OUTER RING CALLS ON THE LEADER TO EXERCISE WISDOM, CREATIVITY, AND HUMILITY.

In contrast to the inner core, the outer ring is “loose” and appropriately flexible, generating a wide range of constructive attitudes, decisions and actions necessary to stay effective in changing circumstances.

THE GOLDILOCKS CHALLENGE.

The leadership challenge is to keep the inner core and outer ring operating in the “Goldilocks zone,” meaning a “just right” relationship between the inner core and outer ring, with the “loose-tight” properties working in synch and harmony. This serves two critical functions. First, when the inner core and outer ring are properly related, the inner core serves as the leader’s spiritual and moral center of gravity, determining the appropriate range of attitudes and behaviors expressed in the outer ring. In other words, even though the outer ring is flexible, this does not mean “anything goes.” Rather,

the inner core provides boundaries for the outer ring, infusing it with enduring values and providing a moral compass to guide daily interactions in a contextually appropriate manner.

Second, when the inner core and outer ring are in the Goldilocks zone, the outer ring serves the critical function of informing the inner core with real world-real time feedback and information relevant to sustained effectiveness. This prompts the leader to exercise wisdom and discernment in the process of applying timeless principles in a timely, context-friendly way; to effectively express one’s enduring beliefs and core values in a transient world.

LOOKING AHEAD.

We’ll get to the porcupines and chameleons in the next installments, which explore what it looks like when the inner core and outer ring lose their vital, “just right” connection and the leader wanders outside the Goldilocks zone.

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