

# TGIF Taking Great Ideas Forward

Improving Northern Capital - Sustainable Development in the Northern Tier

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and do not reflect positions of organizations with which he is affiliated.

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***“Why love if losing hurts so much. We love to know that we are not alone.”***

**-C.S.Lewis-**

## MEETINGS and EVENTS:

Links will provide additional information. Dates for recent additions are in **bold**.

<i>What</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Where</i>
<a href="#">Carbon Strategy Lecture</a>	July 20 <sup>th</sup>	8:30- noon	Shawno Co. Courthouse
<a href="#">Shoreland Protection – Hearings on New Regs.</a>	July 26 <sup>th</sup>	5:45 PM	Rice Lake**
<a href="#">Inventors &amp; Entrepreneurs Club</a>	<b>August 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	6:00 PM	Iron River Community Center
<a href="#">Lake Superior Technology Conference</a>	Aug. 8 & 9	TBA	WITC – Ashland
<a href="#">Green Building</a>	Aug. 10 <sup>th</sup>	8:30 – noon	Shawno Co. Courthouse
BCEDC Board Meeting	August 13 <sup>th</sup>	10 AM – noon	TBA
<a href="#">Wisconsin Natural Resources Board</a>	August 14-15*	Full Day * Half day	Washburn/Bayfield
<a href="#">Investing in Agriculture</a>	August 16	All Day	Pewaukee WI
Bayfield County <a href="#">Lakes Forum</a> Annual Meeting	August 18 <sup>th</sup>	9:00-11:00 AM	Iron River Community Center
<a href="#">Great Lakes Restoration Conference</a>	Sept 6-8	All Day	Chicago
<a href="#">Lake Superior Binational Forum</a>	Sept. 7 & 8	All Day	Wawa, ON
<a href="#">Rustic Roads Board</a>	Sept. 10 <sup>th</sup>	9:00 – noon	Madison

\*\* Check the link for details. Rice Lake is the closest of seven hearing sessions.

**“That's the way we've always done it.”**

**Peter Senge** has become a focus of my thinking and reading recently. One of the five disciplines he espouses for a “learning organization” is examination of mental models. Examining how we personally conceive the elements of our world view is challenging enough. Trying to guide members of an organization to challenge their individual and collective patterns for dealing with problems seems daunting. Senge provides important insight for seeing new paths.

Awareness of mental models and how they operate to control our thinking is a huge challenge. Kind of like fixing an airplane while it is flying. Thinking about thinking while doing thinking has been labeled metacognition by cognitive psychologists. Why do we think about what we think about?

One of Senge's mentors, Harvard Professor Emeritus **Chris Argyris**, has fostered thinking about thinking. His “action science” seeks methods to examine the mental frames that determine what we do, why we do what we do and how we do it. Psychologists can be very divided. Behaviorists insist all we can deal with are observable behaviors; it is futile to open the black box of the mind. Cognitive psychology pries open the black box.

Valuing openness and curiosity can enable useful discussions. Asking questions about why we do what we do can lead us into the black box. Cognitive psychology is providing better flashlights. The problem of using the flashlight is that the flashlight is still being designed and has a crappy switch that doesn't always work even when you fumble around in the dark and finally find it. But if we are open and curious we may flip the switch and catch a glimpse of some pretty interesting stuff.

The challenges of adopting digital technology for solving problems is an interesting challenge itself. Understanding reasons and reasoning for adopting or not adopting digital technology can be fodder for cognitive science.

A familiar response to suggestions about technology is: “for this small project it (hardware, software, network tools) just isn't worth the effort.” Why use a canon when a BB gun will do? One organization I worked with was, and still is, held back by a simple accounting system that survived when a modestly more robust digital system was suggested. A board member with great gravitas and a reputation for accounting savvy said; “We can do this with a number two pencil and half of a 21 column pad.” Arguments for building capacity were ignored. Excel is providing about half of 21 columns to this day. Growth isn't anticipated. Decent budgets, let alone budgets that express the organization's values, are essentially foreign objects. Would a sophisticated accounting method have propelled growth? No! But the mental model of a small organization staying static restrained a vision of possibilities. Keeping it simple too soon can stifle imagination of ideas for a better and bigger future.

We frequently think that overcoming resistance to new ideas is mostly a function of persistence. Yet in addition to the persistent personality becoming pretty obnoxious, there may well be underlying obstacles to adoption of a new idea that no amount of persistent, repetitious recitation of arguments will overcome. That leads back to mental models. Fostering organizational change is not for the faint of heart. Defending the way “it” has always been done is part of a survival strategy for some individuals. Past successes and reasons for those past successes are strongly conserved in many organizations. Small incremental change, or memetic drift, may occur when sheer laziness or personal convenience intervene, in the guise of a new

notion, to shape a novel or cleverly convenient solution. Saving time and saving money is an attractive reason for doing a whole lot of what we do, particularly when business efficiency and take-home profits or paychecks are at stake for stakeholders.

## **LIGHTER SIDE:**

from : Steven Bedrick

While sitting in lab the other day, a discussion broke out about weekend plans. Naturally, these plans consisted mainly of drinking. Or, as one person referred to it, "killing brain cells". Someone observed that, even though alcohol supposedly kills brain cells, they seem to do better in classes during which they regularly take in modest amounts of alcohol than in classes where they don't. This turned out to be a fairly common phenomenon.

Since this was during a cell bio class, and we'd been studying biochemical pathways all day, we started theorizing about different mechanisms of how, exactly, this works. We came up with two good ones: the "natural selection" mechanism, and the "exfoliation" mechanism.

The natural selection theory states that drinking: alcohol kills off the weak, old, and slow brain cells, leaving only the more fit and effective ones.

The exfoliation theory holds that alcohol removes the old, crusty, dead layer of brain cells, exposing young fresh ones which are much faster. Sort of like peeling an onion.

Either hypothesis fits the data, but in order to determine which is the true explanation, more "field study" will have to be done... such is the price of science.

Take care and have a great weekend!

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*In addition Bruce maintains the following affiliations:*

[Bayfield County Economic Development Corporation](#), (BCEDC) *Director*

[Inland Sea Society](#), (ISS) *Director*

[Lake Superior Binational Forum](#), (LSBF) *US Delegation Co-Chair*

[Raindrop Garden Gallery](#), (RGG) *Co-owner*

[IDEA Consortium LLC](#), *Owner*

[Chequamegon Institute, Inc.](#) *Initial Registered Agent*

[Coalition for Eco-Industrial Development](#), (CEID) *Work Group Member*

[Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board](#), (WIB) *Member*

*The encircled fractal triangle represents an integrated cluster of seven ideas – economics, ecology, equity, ethics, experience, education and energy – that may be considered a core for sustainability studies. Bruce is available to present illustrated lectures and facilitate discussions about role of education in Industrial Ecology, Sustainable Development and the Sustainability Revolution.*