

# **CARING, CONTEXTING, CAPACITY BUILDING**

## **Refocusing Human Sensitivity in a Digital World**

### **Dedication**

THIS PAPER IS DEDICATED TO

HUMAN BEINGS OF THE 7<sup>TH</sup> GENERATION FROM NOW IN THE WORLD'S

CITIES

## **CARING, CONTEXTING, CAPACITY BUILDING**

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.

- *Old Chinese proverb*

## ABSTRACT

“How are our systems supporting us in the fullness of our humanity?” Answering this research question moved my career from the study of leadership patterns to the connections amongst teams, organizations, communities and now cities – in both face-to-face and digital worlds. I have written three books that explore how to redesign the city as a living system that makes us feel fully alive as individuals and collectives. In the *Integral City* books, I explore human systems that integrate development in person, people, place and planet. I consider three themes that are critical factors for designing generative relationships for a collective life that works for all life; namely, Caring, Contexting and Capacity Building. This trio is fundamental to the qualities of survival, adaptation and regeneration that define all living systems and can be traced through the expansion of moral influence, spatial influence and evolutionary time horizons. Refocusing human sensitivity in a digital world requires the integration of the inner journey of Care with the outer journey of Contexting through the integration of Capacity Building. The combination of the overview effect and the integration effect enable a holarchy of complexity to emerge in all scales of human life in the city that is made coherent through decisions that are aligned around the Master Code of Care: to care for Self, Others, Place and Planet. This will enable sensitivity to have a trajectory to the 7<sup>th</sup> generation in the future, a time span that many indigenous people consider relevant to making wise and caring decisions that support our living planet, Gaia in the fullness of her systems.

## Introduction

Twenty years ago, I participated in an online experiment (this was before Facebook was invented). Sponsored by Margaret Wheatley and her associates, the Berkana Community of Conversations was convened on a list serve with 300 registrants, to explore the question, “How are our systems supporting us in the fullness of our humanity?” It also became the case study for my dissertation examining the relationship between learning, leadership and self-organizing online community systems (Hamilton, 1999).

This research opened my career from the study of leadership patterns to the connections amongst teams, organizations, communities and now cities – in both face-to-face and digital worlds.

Since my dissertation opened up the worlds of both in-person and online connections, I have written three books that record the logs of my mission to redesign the city as a living system that makes us feel fully alive as individuals and collectives. Such a design rests firmly on the assumption that we can refocus our relationships – both digital and in person – so we are mutually caring and sensitive to self, others, place and planet. In the tradition of Action Research, the books follow the sequence **What, So What, and Now What**.

In the first book I proposed **What is an Integral City? *Integral City: Evolutionary Intelligences for the Human Hive*** (Hamilton, 2008) examined the evidence for a new paradigm of the city as a living human system, complex in its dynamics and evolutionary in its nature. Like the multiple intelligences we have as individuals, I considered in each of the 12 chapters an intelligence that applied to the city, presaging James Lovelock’s (2009) conjecture that humans are the reflective organ of the living Earth or Gaia. In Book One I offered a developmental point of view, integrating perspectives that recognize the fractal patterns in human systems that repeat

and resonate from the smallest individual scale, up through increasing levels of complexity – to city scale.

In the second book I explored **So what are the ways we can know, act, relate and create an Integral City?** *Integral City Inquiry & Action: Designing Impact for the Human Hive* (Hamilton, 2017) differentiates two aspects of the whole that make up the city; namely, the Placecaring left hand quadrants of the Integral model (consciousness and culture) and the Placemaking right hand quadrants (behaviors and systems/infrastructure). Each chapter engages readers through integrally designed inquiry and action to achieve impact that resonates for self, others, place and planet. At the time of writing Book Two I was really struck with Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical "Laudato Si" (2015) that explored Integral Ecology's embrace of human systems in ways that value all the developmental expressions of person, place and planet that coexist in the living city.

In my third book I turned to the question **Now what do we do as a result of our intelligences, inquiry, action and impact?** *Integral City 3.7: Reframing Complex Challenges for Gaia's Human Hives* (Hamilton, 2018) expands my perspective of change in the human system from the personal, to the shared city place to a planet of cities. As I trace out the implications of an Integral City complex operating system, I explore human systems that integrate development in person, people, place and planet – even from a Kosmic view.

The Kosmic view (as different from the word 'cosmic' in its literal sense) shares the **overview effect** that has inspired me to see the city as a living planetary system. Intending to connect my generation's mindsets with my granddaughter's generation, I paradoxically venture into outer space and borrow the "overview effect" phenomenon from the observations of astronauts. They first noticed that the view of Earth from space changed their mindsets,

worldviews and relationship to Earth. Space explorers like Edgar Mitchell (Mitchell & Williams, 2001) were so impacted by their inner as well as outer space journeys, that they opened their scientific stance to embrace spirituality. The classical view of ‘noetic’ as concerning itself with the processes, states and events in the real world of space and time had changed to the study of how beliefs, thoughts and intentions affect the physical world.<sup>1</sup> By the time I met Mitchell in 2002 he had become the founder of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) and influenced the thinking of a whole generation of advanced researchers, who in turn became my personal mentors either directly or indirectly. People like social anthropologist Marilyn Schlitz, philosopher Ken Wilber, biologist Rupert Sheldrake, organizational leader Margaret Wheatley and inspirator Willis Harman inspired me to explore how my life is impacted by the invisible worlds of energy, fields and spirit that co-exist and in-form the visible worlds of matter, life and ecology.

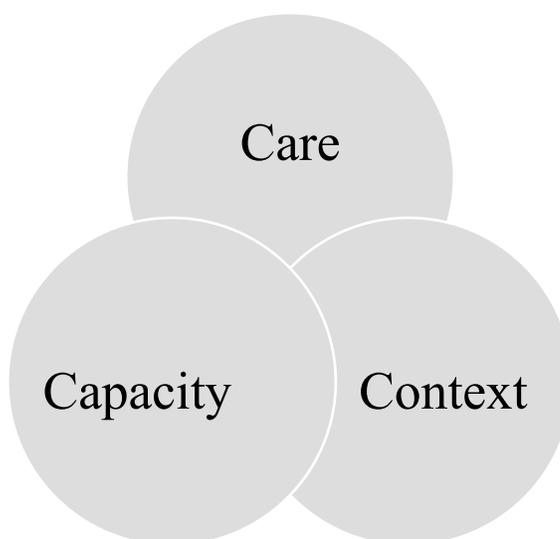
Under their influence I noticed that the city, as the most complex human system yet created, is visible from space. That overview of Gaia and her cities precipitated an **integrating effect**, re-minding me that human systems like digital networks, supply chains and governance systems impact the Earth systems that have evolved us. Leadership and Organizational Development Expert, Ron Heifetz<sup>2</sup> uses a similar metaphor when he invites leaders to take a break from the dance floor of life and come up to the balcony where it is possible to see the relationships of all the dancers on the floor and how they influence one another. This simple change of perspective gives a personal experience of the “overview effect” to the leader, broadens her focus and potentially deepens her sensitivity to the context that contains and connects her relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noetics>

## Holographic Dimensions

In the same third book, I consider the implications of evolving persons, people, and places into a Planet of Integral Cities. I take journeys into three holographic dimensions: Care, Context and Capacity (CCC). In these holographies, I find it virtually impossible to separate caring from the context of the life conditions in which care is expressed. Moreover, how I (and my granddaughter) personally **care** is developed within the **context** of life conditions that can only be appreciated through expanding levels of **capacity**. (See Figure 1.)



*Figure 1: Interlocking Holographies of Care, Context, Capacity (CCC)*

In the process of contemplating the magic and mystery of the city's holographies, I have discovered an almost infinite kaleidoscope of lenses to consider these three dimensions.

Noticing that this holographic trio is fractal in nature, I frame it as the qualities that my granddaughter and all living human systems at all scales possess (Capra, 1996) as they **survive**, **adapt** and **regenerate**. As I turn the kaleidoscope of the whole system, I contemplate how human sensitivity emerges from the shared patterns of CCC personal experience. I realize for

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<sup>2</sup> A Survival Guide for Leaders by Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Harvard Business Review June 2002 issue.

instance thinking of my granddaughter's life, Caring may influence her Context and/or Capacity; Context may amplify her Capacity and/or Caring; Capacity Building may embrace both her Caring and Contexting.

As I have also explored how the triad shows up in my own leadership, my granddaughter's development and those of my university students, I have noticed morality, space and time intersect in ways that seem to grow the nest of fractals as a whole at all scales of human systems (Hamilton, 2015). I have glimpsed courageous expressions of moral influence in Care – for example, when a health care worker breaks the rules to look after a whole neighborhood (as Frederic Laloux (2014) documents about the “Teal” Netherlands’ health care system of Buurtzorg, which translates as “neighbourhood care”). I have seen the life-saving impact of expanding spatial influence in Contexting when a citizen activist recognized that water quality could be endangering life for a whole city like Walkerton, Ontario, in 2000. And I have witnessed the dynamic time influence in Capacity Building when an elder touches the life of a teenager with tough love that transforms them from a gang member to an entrepreneur in the Abbotsford Canada project Food for Thought in 2010. When I contemplate the combination of Care, Contexting and Capacity Building as a continuum in the very real lives of my own family, then I appreciate that leaders, organizations and city governance systems reflect these qualities. Cities – human hives - are habitats where my granddaughter and all the people she interacts with are constantly transacting, recalibrating and even transforming their Caring, Contexting and Capacity Building practices within the dimensions of morality, space and time. I refer to my granddaughter here because for me she represents the inter-generational investment in these three dimensions – and someone born into a Digital World.

### **Deepening Care Expands Inner Journey**

Caring in my granddaughter is a personal expression of moral influence. Caring may be considered her **inner journey**. It sensitizes her to an **inner view** of her reality. She experiences it as four perspectives: herself as I; others as You/We; place as It; and planet as Its.

Deepening care unfolds a continuum of circles of care. Children, like my granddaughter, as an infant “self” start out by being completely dependent on “others” for traversing this stage of existence. In her case, the others were parents and immediate family members. (In other cases, they may be family surrogates.)

As my granddaughter progressed through this stage, she became increasingly more capable of caring not just for her own survival but contributing to the care of others within the family unit. This natural progression opened her up to a sense of belonging – which germinated care for progressively larger scales of influence in the family, friends, school, neighbors, workers, groups, community, city, nation and planet. (Until now, she operates a business taken over from her mother; enjoys the challenges of being a mother and spouse herself; and serves clients from around the world in a movie catering business.)

As the study of capacity building has shown, when the object of care moves from the inner subjective (self) and intersubjective (others) to the outer objective (habitat) and inter-objective (city) dimensions, the circles of care become stabilized at more complex levels (Cooke-Greuter ,1999, 2002; Fowler, 1981; Gilligan,1982; Graves, 1971, 1974, 1981, 2003, 2005; O’Fallon, 2010; Kegan, 1994; Torbert, 2004; Wilber, 1995,1996, 2000). Healthy caring becomes imbued with belonging and attachment that is experienced as deep love and spiritual connection to self, others, city and planet as inextricably interlinked. This array of deep care may be the source of the experience of Oneness that Edgar Mitchell experienced and is shared by all faith

systems (Weaver,2017). I summarize this depth of care in the **Master Code: caring for self, others, place, planet** (Hamilton, 2008, 2017). For the first time in history each of us as individual humans (including my granddaughter) have the opportunity to practice this kind of care simultaneously at all levels, which in itself is reflexive and reflective as one level of care mirrors the other levels of care. Furthermore, this kind of care reveals how Goodness, Truth and Beauty can resensitize us to enacting decision processes with human creativity or even spirituality that permeates all the co-existing realities of the city.

### **Raising Context Expands Outer Journey**

Contexting is an expression of spatial influence that represents my granddaughter's **outer journey**. It gives her an **overview – like the astronauts**. She generally experiences personal context in terms of progressively expanding boundaries: home, street, school, neighborhood, city, eco-region, nation, continent, hemisphere, planet.

Context expands as her care deepens – and vice versa. It is as though the expansion of her inner dimension of care enables the expansion of her outer dimension of space. As a developing human, she literally expands her views of the outer world – thus expanding the boundaries to which she belongs and is attached.

In spatial terms related to our analog and digital worlds, we can think of these boundaries as horizons that contain our caring mindsets, worldviews and behaviors. As we mature, these boundaries also contain organizations that become progressively more complex.

My granddaughter probably senses these contexts in her personal life in terms of material objective artefacts – like resources, materials and buildings - as well as systems, infrastructures and the environment – like roads, water systems, communication devices, and ecologies. In fact, my granddaughter faced all these realities as she moved from a rented house to building her own

house on acreage where she and her husband had to build the systems and structures to support the rudiments (and luxuries) of daily living.

Many whose lives and interests become context driven ignore or overlook that our outer contexts determine and limit our inner caring and integrating capacity dimensions. As we are coming to see however, personal perceptions and expansions of context are as much driven by caring and capacity building as the other way around. For instance, as my granddaughter has discovered, it was impossible for her architect to imagine and design a house for her without reference to what they as designers personally cared about, what she and her husband personally valued and what the personal and professional expertise of the design/build team had the capacity to manifest. Even in our digital world, digital designers are directed by their perception of contexts about what is or is not possible.

My granddaughter is beginning to see that the spatial boundaries that provide supportive containment for her new house also limit the systems she can develop within those given contexts, as well as her access to the resources that expand possibilities for family care and wellbeing— in a seemingly infinite array of systems, outside systems, outside systems of context, etcetera.

Recognizing this array of nested systems, researcher of complex human development, Clare Graves (Graves, 1971, 2005) proposed, that life conditions create a web of ever-evolving human contexts, where each of us is inextricably intertwined into a double helix of inner caring (values) systems and outer ‘contexting’ life conditions. Together these constantly influence and change each other resulting in the emergence of ever more complex capacities.

### Widening Capacity Integrates Inner Care & Outer Context

Measuring capacity reveals my granddaughter's personal capability, competence and performance. Capacity reflects the dimensions that enable her to grow care and contexting over her lifetime (see Figure 2). It energetically integrates her inner dimensions with her outer dimensions and vice versa. As such, capacity is an expression of dynamic time influence on the energetic and evolutionary journey of her life. Capacity reveals my granddaughter's response systems for dynamic change. Capacity progressively 'complexifies' as she organizes her personal expressions of leadership, organizational roles, systemic structures/infrastructures, human settlements (including house, street, community, city) and ultimately a whole planetary system of cities.

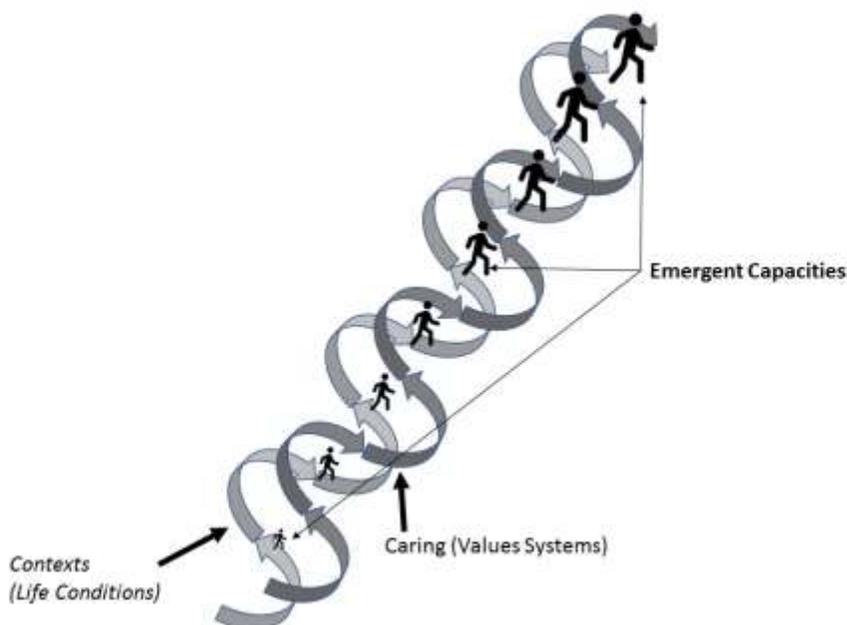


Figure 2: Graves Double Helix of Contexts, Caring, Capacities

If we want to refocus human sensitivity in a digital world, then we can think of caring as the dimension of **moral influence**, and contexting as the dimension of **spatial influence**, while capacity building as the spiral of change, is the dimension of **evolutionary time influence**.

If I ask myself whether we can refocus human sensitivity in a digital world, the answer emerges when I look at my granddaughter. I see that caring provides her fundamental life force for **surviving** (as child, youth, adult); contexting provides her fundamental life force for **adapting to her environment(s)** (at home, school, work, business, house location); while her capacity provides her fundamental life force for **regenerating** (as supplier, designer, employer, mother). Somehow human systems (even governance) must create the container for all three dimensions to co-exist in a healthy way.

In fact, in terms of a personal life cycle like my granddaughter's, human learning, leadership and governance systems must enable developmental capacity-building that tracks the stages of maturity through fetus, infant, child, youth, parent, adult, grandparent and elder. The building of capacity must have the flexibility for her inner growth of caring and her outer response-ability to life conditions. This kind of development can enable regeneration not only for the bodily birth-death cycle but the "never-ending quest" (1974, 2005) of psychological, emotional, intellectual (and even epigenetic (Lipton, 2005) development from her generation to the next.

Graves' (1971, 1974, 1981, 2003, 2005) research identified seven distinct stages of development along the double helix – with an eighth one showing promise of emerging at the conclusion of his research (in 1987). Graves was one of the first psychologists who recognized that the stages of capacity building in adult humans produced a natural hierarchy of complexity,

where each stage in the sequence of development provides the foundation for the subsequent stage of development. (See Figure 2.)

As other studies of social sciences have come on stream, this developmental sequence has become widely recognized as global and transcultural – with great variations in surface expression dependent on contexting life conditions. And although different researchers have expressed the levels of complexity in multiple ways (Wilber, 2000), the capacity building sequence itself has become affirmed

Thus, my granddaughter is discovering – within her own personal “analog and digital worlds” that the widening of capacity has another more deeply personal and complex aspect to it – capacity expands to include how she organizes herself to regenerate in the world. As she expands her contexts and expands the number of other people she includes in her caring circles, she needs progressively more complex organizational patterns and processes to achieve the balance between her inner lives and outer lives. These organizational patterns emerge in her own lifetime – just as they have emerged over historical time of the human species - and include family hearths, kinship clans or tribes, friendship kingdoms, bureaucracies, entrepreneurial endeavors, social enterprises, ecological networks and global stewardships.

### **Collaborating Across Holarchies of Care, Context, Capacity**

As we consider how Care, Contexting and Capacity contribute to designing human systems that are sensitive even in a digital world, we can see how new systems – like governance - emerge as sets of nested holarchies – or natural hierarchies.

**Holarchies of care** emerge from the deepening of care from ego, to ethno, to place and planet.

**Holarchies of context** emerge from the raising of our horizon lines to include ever greater spatial boundaries, thus expanding our overview of life conditions from local, to regional, to continental to planetary.

**Holarchies of capacity** mature the organization of our living systems from time horizons where our actions are measured with immediate effect to ever-lengthening horizons where the consequences of our actions can be measured in days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries and even millennia (Dutrisac et al, nd).

Thus, the impacts of capacity building sprout in my granddaughter's simple family-based home and evolve to the very complex movie catering business (using environmentally sensitive ingredients, materials and waste management systems) and maybe someday could even expand to serving the International Space Stations or satellites now roaming the galaxies. Without too much imagination we can see how important it is to enliven the focus on human sensitivity as a prerequisite to feeling fully alive in our digital and other worlds.

These natural hierarchies (nested holarchies) all offer opportunities for cross-connection and collaboration that can exponentially expand their power and potential for evolving our human systems to a more complex level. From a city perspective, they give us interdependent access points for engaging with the city as an indivisible wholeness – a veritable form of “divine” active engagement, that Patten (2018, Chapter 3) describes as “radical activism”.

### **Reframing Complex Challenges in 3 Parts and 4 Voices**

By exploring real issues and challenges on the voyage to healthy human systems that generates value for all Life, the 4 Voices of the City – whom I call Citizens, Civic Managers, Civil Society and Business/Innovators – must all show leadership through these 3 holographies.

We have just considered the leadership journey of a Citizen in our digital-analog world in the person of my granddaughter. But her experience in the dimensions of Inner Care, Outer Context and Intertwining Capacity is also the journey of evolution that organizations who operate the city – the Civic Managers in City Hall, Education, Healthcare, Police, Fire, Emergency Response, Justice – must also negotiate. Likewise, the engagement of Civic Managers with the organizations in the Civil Society and Business Sector means that they face exponentially greater challenges because each sector includes individuals on their own developmental, dynamic journeys through Care, Context and Capacity.

How we align these energetics in both the digital and analog worlds goes back to tapping into the power of the overview effect. (It can also be explored dialogically through the kinds of questions I have appended to this article below.) From the vantage point of the balcony (or space station) we can see that for the first time in history, we have the opportunity to align all our decisions with the Master Code of Care. If each of us as individuals, teams, organizations, sectors and communities could ask ourselves, “How does my decision impact care for Self, Others, Place and Planet” we would be sensitive to all the generations alive today and well into the 7<sup>th</sup> generation from now.

This article has pointed to a whole systems approach for resensitizing human systems at all scales in our digital and analog worlds that integrates the personal, developmental and evolutionary.

Thank you for joining this grandmother on an exploration of how we can sensitize human systems in all our worlds. I dedicate this quest to the daughters, sons, grandchildren and great grandchildren unto the seventh generation who will live in the cities where we have made

decisions that are imbued with human sensitivity for ourselves and all who follow us on this living planet Gaia.

## **QUESTIONS**

- 1. How does my personal development of Care/Contexting/Capacity Building as an “I” bootstrap development of others and together how do we bootstrap a “We-space”? How does developing “We-space” for Care/Contexting/Capacity Building in turn bootstrap my own development?**
- 2. How do we integrate Care/Contexting/Capacity Building into the design of Education and Health Care systems that serve multiple levels of wellbeing in a holistic values-based and culturally sensitive manner that support the wellbeing of all life?**
- 3. How do we allow for individual optimization of Governance Systems in the context of collective optimization of Care/Contexting/Capacity Building? How do we design Education systems that enable both?**
- 4. How powerful is individual intention for Care/Contexting/Capacity Building on Governance Systems? Shared intention?**
- 5. How do we plan for the “never-ending quest” of human evolution of Care/Contexting/Capacity Building? How do we capitalize on ever-increasing Care/Contexting/Capacity Building? How do we not leave people behind?**
- 6. How much is enough Care/Contexting/Capacity Building to produce a world that is sustainable and resilient?**
  - a. How much CCC is enough to obtain the basics of life?**
  - b. How much CCC is enough to nurture family bonds?**
  - c. How much CCC is enough to express personal power?**
  - d. How much CCC is enough to enforce authority, standards, rules and laws?**

- e. **How much CCC is enough to produce strategic plans, technology and stuff?**
- f. **How much CCC is enough to ensure social safety nets?**
- g. **How much CCC is enough to sustain resilience, flexibility and flow?**
- h. **How much CCC is enough to enable global thinking, acting, relating and producing?**

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