

## **A GLOBAL ODYSSEY: A PERSONAL AND NATIONAL SEARCH FOR CROSS-CULTURAL HARMONY AND IMPROVED PERFORMANCE**

### **A Personal Invitation to Engage With the Chief Explorer of the Innovation Expedition in Reviewing, Reflecting on and Reacting to Stories from his Life Journey**

---



Donald G. Simpson  
Chief Explorer  
The Innovation Expedition

*“We are entering an Age of Unreason, a time when the future, in so many areas, is to be shaped by us and for us; a time when the only prediction that will hold true is that no predictions will hold true; a time therefore for bold imagining in private life as well as public; for thinking the unlikely and doing the unreasonable.”*

—from the **Age of Unreason** by Charles Handy<sup>1</sup>

This is your invitation to join me in reflecting on a personal journey I have been describing as “*A Global Odyssey: A Personal and National Journey Towards Cross-Cultural Harmony and High Performance.*”

My passion has been to explore the world—both the physical world with its wonderfully diverse communities, and the world of ideas that I have come to know as being equally diverse. For five decades I have wandered the world seeking breakthrough ideas and the people behind them. I have experimented with innovative applications of those ideas in an eclectic career as educator, entrepreneur, researcher, administrator, consultant, mentor and as Chief Explorer of the Innovation Expedition, a global network organization I founded in 1991.

My focus now is on sharing with others—as coach, mentor, writer and speaker—the insights gained through work in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors in over 75 countries.

---

<sup>1</sup> With the reference to this classic book by Handy, I am offering readers an introduction to the first of an extensive list of contacts and publications by transformational leaders who have influenced me greatly during my more than 50 year Global Odyssey.

My passion is to help leaders develop the skills for unleashing innovations to help their organizations seize opportunities offered by a fast-changing, knowledge-based, global economy and to organize themselves to unleash innovations aimed at bringing about dramatic improvements in organizational performance.

My larger purpose is to support leaders who also aspire to contribute to the creation of happy, healthy, productive, benevolent, globally connected and harmonious multicultural communities offering prosperity and a high quality of life to all citizens.

(For more details about my life, my interests and my experiences, please join my personal LinkedIn site.)

### **A New Series of Excerpts from the Logbooks of the Chief Explorer**

My intent is to start sharing with you various incidents in my life through a series of *Excerpts from the Logbooks of the Chief Explorer*. Each full Logbook contains 40 or more pages of my reflections on my more than 50 years of work and travel globally.

Each *Excerpt* presents a short story taken from one of the larger Logbooks. They describe some of my personal, diverse experiences and explore how these experiences helped me prepare to take on my role as Chief Explorer, mentoring senior leaders in a wide variety of organizations and facilitating change projects globally in a diverse range of sectors.

The different resources in the series of Logbook Excerpts from my Odyssey all feature personal reflections on the major phases of my eclectic, global, cross-cultural career. The unifying focus of these stories is on some incredible individuals who mentored me, as well as on the wide variety of cross-cultural experiences that helped me build my capacity to mentor others to function successfully in a highly competitive, fast-changing, global, knowledge-based economy.

### **Purpose of the Excerpts**

The *Excerpts* are intended to inspire and support individuals who are on their own journeys to develop mentoring skills which will give them the capacity to help leaders learn how to collaborate and innovate in order to solve complex tasks, all aimed at achieving dramatic improvements in organizational performance.

In telling my stories I have tried to highlight some of the challenges I faced in addressing complex challenges in diverse cross-cultural environments. There is much to learn from initial failures and so through the stories I reflect on how knowledge gaps and mistaken assumptions often constrained my efforts. Reporting on situations in which I achieved some significant successes, I try to highlight how I addressed those challenges and filled in key gaps in my knowledge and my understanding of

the cultural attributes of others. I particularly want to introduce readers to many of the mentors who provided me with such support. I want to identify the leadership insights I gained from these mentors.

Through these stories I am also eager to share much of the learning I have gained through my global experiences by offering readers access to a distinctive mentoring process our Innovation Expedition team has developed. The Challenge Dialogue System (CDS™) involves a highly flexible, comprehensive, customized and experiential-learning approach for mentoring leaders to function in a collaborative, entrepreneurial, innovative manner in order to dramatically improve organizational performance.

## **Reflections on My Personal Journey in Search of Cross-Cultural Harmony and High Performance**

Those who know me today as a businessman—founder and Chief Explorer of the Innovation Expedition—might be surprised to learn how much my world view has been shaped by my initial role as a high school teacher and football coach, my work camp experiences in Africa early in my career, my Master’s thesis on the New Imperialism in Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, my doctoral thesis on communities of people of African origin in Canada before Confederation, my participation in building organizations focused on linking Canada with the developing world, and my work with aboriginal nations in Canada.

Eventually I made the move to position myself as an entrepreneurial mentor focused on supporting significant change leaders in the business, research, education, government and nonprofit sectors. In the late 70s and early 80s, I made the transition from educator to entrepreneur and was involved in creating two consulting companies and a fledgling trading operation.

A major driver in shaping my 50-year Global Odyssey has been the recognition by the early nineties that a major shift was underway globally in which the confluence of a number of forces of change was stimulating the emergence of a quite different economy which was highly competitive, fast-changing, global, and based to a great extent on knowledge as a key asset. I began to understand the increasingly complex challenges that leaders were now facing in a changed global economy.

Our Innovation Expedition team recognized in the early nineties that a new style of leadership had become the key point of leverage for a nation, an organization or an individual in the fast-changing, global, knowledge-based economy, with its different operating principles. My desire was to understand how to better prepare myself and others for success in this kind of world.

In 1991 when I was serving as vice-president at the world famous Banff Centre in the Canadian Rockies, I founded the Innovation Expedition as a new style global network business to identify, connect, and mentor influential innovators and potential innovators from around the world. It is

now structured as a privately owned, incorporated business and it continues to be the focus for all my national and global initiatives.

## **Reflections on a National Journey to Cross-Cultural Harmony**

While the stories in the Odyssey are built around my personal learning experiences I have also placed these experiences in the context of Canada's journey from colony to contributor as it stepped out from behind the influence of Great Britain and began to develop different types of relationships with countries in Africa and Asia, and increasingly became a destination for immigrants from those countries.

From a perspective of a national journey, the Odyssey addresses four major themes:

1. Canada's interaction, starting in the late 1950s, with newly independent countries in Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, Central and South America—with a particular focus on Africa and the education of Canadians about Africa.
2. Slowly growing awareness among the Canadian public and politicians of the existence of Afro-Canadian communities - their unique challenges and contributions, and their connections with African diaspora communities in other countries.
3. Efforts by Aboriginal communities to gain widespread acceptance and support of their distinct position in Canada as a society—their characterization of themselves as a "Fourth World" facing issues similar to those of the poorer countries then known as the Third World.
4. Canada's evolution from a society in which official racism was quietly but effectively embedded in government policies, to an official multicultural society—a startling journey.

Some of these excerpts from my Logbooks chart the impact of the above interactions, which moved Canada in fewer than 50 years from a society in which official racism was quietly but effectively embedded in government policies to a position as one of the world's first official multicultural societies. The Logbook looks at this transformation not only through the lens of my personal Odyssey, but also through the eyes and memories of the many colleagues with whom I've had the opportunity to collaborate.

The Logbook Excerpts also track my involvement in the birth of new organizations seeking to connect Canadians with societies in the developing world. These include stories outlining involvement with organizations such as the African Students Foundation, Canadian Crossroads Africa (now Canadian Crossroads International), Hamilton Goodwill Africa Foundation, Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Another Excerpt describes my early interactions with Canadians of African decent in southwestern Ontario, and the realization of their dream of creating a Canadian Black History museum in Buxton, Ontario (now a National Historic Site). It explores my slow journey to better understand the roots of racism and approaches for addressing such challenges.

Yet another in the series looks at the parallels I saw between the challenges facing low-income countries in Africa and Asia and the determination of First Nations in Canada to chart a course toward economic and social development that was right for their cultures, histories and aspirations. This included their desire to remove the full colonial system functioning in Canada's northern territories.

### **The Latest Phase in my Global Odyssey is Launched on my 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

On July 13, 2014 I turned 80. When friends and family asked me what kind of celebration I, as Chief Explorer of the Innovation Expedition, would welcome to mark this milestone, I found myself musing on what we could do that:

- *is innovative*
- *involves an exploratory journey*
- *is global in perspective*
- *brings together diverse friends and colleagues from every phase of my life*
- *is informative, innovative and inspiring to all who participate*
- *challenges participants to engage in collaborative innovations*
- *and is built around a theme I'm passionate about*

### **A Year to Explore**

I hatched a plan to head out on a yearlong global expedition to deepen my understanding of what I've come to think of as "Modern-Day Renaissance Leadership." Since last July I have been engaging with others who share this interest and working with them to learn more about what Renaissance Leadership is and why it matters. I have been seeking out its practitioners (Renaissance Pathfinders) and documenting what innovations they have given to the world and what has been possible as a result.

**Note:** In my personal LinkedIn Site I have begun to post Scouting Reports (Blogs) on the Renaissance Expedition in which I introduce these 50 Pathfinders and the innovations they have designed and are implementing.

## **Premise Behind the Sharing of all the Resources on a Global Odyssey**

I have been reminiscing about my past journeys because I have been welcoming into my ongoing work life new colleagues from various backgrounds who continuously question me about why a specific event happened, or why people think in a particular way, or why a development strategy had been used, or why do I believe strongly in a particular approach and how did I learn that approach.

In short they are asking me to explain how I built the confidence and skills to function as a successful mentor for leaders looking to succeed in the new global knowledge economy. I have been experiencing the same reactions from a number of young social activists, who have been seeking my assistance to help them better understand the dynamics of development and to help them put some present change management efforts into perspective.

I also have been reminiscing about all these diverse cross-cultural and community development experiences to help me collaborate with other colleagues in co-creating a philosophic statement linking public agencies, business, and civil society organizations efforts in creative models for development. This includes designing, developing and delivering, with some alliance partners, the potential power of a broad-based concept of “Social Enterprise” and the implications of this thinking to transform community development initiatives.

While I have been reminiscing through this activity, I have been relearning old things, which I have picked up over the past 50 years. This reliving of experiences from the past allows me to integrate consciously what I have learned from these diverse activities and to apply the learning to new complex challenges.

I hope as a reader you will understand and appreciate my need as an instinctive educator to write these stories from my Odyssey and to use them as a mirror, first of all, to help me integrate my experiences. It is my hope that you will find something which relates to and illuminates your own circumstances and provokes you to respond to me with reactions, criticisms, and suggestions as to how and where my stories might prove to be most valuable for others.

Please join me on this journey.

**LET THE JOURNEY CONTINUE!**