

Dream Intelligence: Tapping Conscious and Non-attended Sources of Intelligence in Organizations

By Marc Maltz and E. Martin Walker

Abstract

This article explores the idea that dreams are a source of intelligence that enhances our ability to perceive social dynamics and learn from experience. Dream “Intelligence” is described as a logical extension of neurological processing that enables cognitive ability¹ and emotional intelligence² where innovation or creative breakthroughs are achieved. We describe a model for organizational innovation and then review the neuroscience of dreams as intelligence, focusing on the role of imagery. We then use the Johari Window to describe how knowledge is managed in organizations. Finally, after describing how dreams examined in the social context (Social Dreaming) actually provide dream intelligence at the social systems level, we give case examples from two companies, one of whom suffered partial destruction during the attack on the World Trade Center. We conclude with some thoughts or, perhaps, a dream about how organizations can productively innovate by developing dream intelligence.

Introduction

Innovation is the product of free thinking, the creative process of generating ideas that occurs when we suspend the binds of daily life and allow our dreams to be expressed and discussed. An aspiration of most organizations, innovation is forever searched for, rarely achieved, yet ever-present. Many organizations try to enhance their creative process through activities that attempt to break the organization’s members out of their normal routine in order to create new ways of working, new products, new ways of serving markets, etc. These processes, though, are usually unsuccessful because they do not allow the participants the opportunity to break from the social and psychological restrictions that inhibit them to contribute to such an effort.

W. Gordon Lawrence has written many examples over the years of how dreams have been the starting point for innovative thinking³. The authors in their own writing⁴ and work with dreams have witnessed the capacity of organizations to understand, learn, and break through traditional knowledge management to create new and innovative approaches to work and develop a deeper understanding of what is occurring. ” By intelligence, we mean “the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations; the skilled use of reason; and the ability to manipulate one’s environment or to think abstractly...” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*).

We believe the process of dreaming and the freeing of a system’s use of those dreams to explore their meaning and not treat them as an individual phenomenon, provides a greater understanding, insight and learning that further develops an organization’s “intelligence”.

¹ Often measured as intelligence quotient (IQ).

² Measured by any number of instruments and known as emotional quotient (EQ). There are numerous publications that expand the theory of Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Quotient. See the writings of Salovey and Mayer, Goleman, Goleman and Boyatzis and/or Bar-on.

³ Lawrence, W. G., **The Social Dreaming Phenomenon**, Harry Stack Sullivan Society Lecture, The William Alanson White Institute, February, 2000.

⁴ Maltz, M. and Walker, E. M., **Simultaneity and parallel process: an on-line applied social dreaming matrix**, *Social Dreaming @ Work*. London: Karnac Books, 1998.

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The Process of Innovation⁵

Let us look at the proto-process through which ideas are generated.

- **Ideas** are the currency of innovation and are generated through intelligence.
- **Intelligence** is the product of both an individual's cognitive intelligence or thinking and emotional intelligence or feeling.
- In organizations, intelligence is constrained by the need to protect against real and imagined loss via personal, interpersonal and group **security** needs (also known as social defense mechanisms).
- Intelligence, the product of our emotional and cognitive abilities, can be freed from these natural security needs.
- The suspension of security needs occurs when one gains access to the uninhibited intelligence that occurs naturally in the brain's processing as represented in people's dreams.
- When properly utilized, dreams release the creative energy within an organization that is necessary for innovation and the emergence of new ideas.

Where Intelligence Comes From: Dreams as a Part of The Brain's Consciousness

The study of neurological impairments via Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) has enabled neural-physiologists to demonstrate that dreams are a critical part of the brain's processing of information. The areas of the brain where our experience, history, knowledge and data-intake is processed daily, coincides with those areas responsible for processing dreams. This processing power is constantly working out of awareness, except for those moments when one remembers a dream or has the feeling of *dejavú*. In this way, the brain is continually integrating and processing thoughts and feelings in a manner which generates new learning and intelligence. Bringing this innate capacity of individuals together on behalf of an organization results in enhanced organizational intelligence.

Dreams are scientifically known to be a key component in how we process our daily emotional and cognitive world. Antonio Damasio describes how the dreaming state of the brain is the only time during a sleeping cycle that the brain is actually "conscious", that "some 'consciousness' is on" during sleep⁶. This consciousness is free of the contextual inhibitions that are imposed during our waking life. Said conversely, our daily ability to use our brain's power is diminished by the normal defense mechanisms that we use to exist and function. Our dream state is free to process our knowledge unencumbered by the distractions that interfere with how we use information⁷.

⁵ Developed in collaboration with S. Fitzpatrick, W. G. Lawrence and B. Patel.

⁶ Damasio, A., *The Feeling of What Happens*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999.

⁷ There are many examples and extensive writing on how the dynamics on daily life interfere with our ability to work, think, process, and so on. A good example is Bion's "Basic Assumptions" that interferes with group member's ability to remain on task and attending to the work they are to be achieving (Bion, W., *Experiences in Groups*, London: Routledge, 1967).

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In the brain, dreams are the state in which conscious processing occurs, regardless of the dreamer's awareness of such dreams⁸. Beyond the dream is the non-attended information of the brain; all that is not conscious, which may or may not seep into our consciousness. Intelligence is derived from three states of conscious processing and numerous states of non-attended processing. At a conscious level, three levels of processing occurs:

1. Awake and aware.
2. Awake and unaware (that part of our dynamic processing which, assuming our capacity to be present in the here-and-now, is dependent on our ability to understand our defense or security operations).
3. Dreaming.

In our non-attended (pre- or un-conscious), there are two broad categories of brain processing:

1. Neural patterning that is stored in memory and retrieved.
2. Neural patterning that is probably stored yet never retrieved or used in our conscious state⁹.

In addition to the above, there is a level of brain functioning that precedes neural patterning and is made up of all of the interactions of the brain's neural-chemistry. This chemical level of neural processing is noted here to emphasize that there is a tremendous amount of data, possibly knowledge, that is never utilized in our conscious states and that remains non-attended. The link between the conscious and the non-attended *is* the dream. And, the dream is a function of our consciousness and contains information and knowledge that is eclipsed by our awakening, sometimes captured in fragments, and clearly an integral part of how we think, work and gain intelligence.

Imagery, A Key to the Brain's Process

The preceding discussion of the brain's neural processing helps us understand how the brain functions utilizing images. Damasio and Llinás¹⁰ have written extensively about how image functioning is *the* primary means by which the brain processes. Said simply, we think in images that are derived from our "sensory modalities – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and somatosensory"¹¹. These images occur in both our non-attended and conscious states. Imagery in the non-attended begins with neural-chemical patterns that derive neural patterns that then give way to memory that then are used in thought¹². There are also the images created in the course of here-and-now functioning that are critical to our creation of knowledge.

There are, then, two image sources that help us form thought. One is memory, which serves as a database of stored images, and the other are images as they are experienced and taken-in. Dream images are a combination of the two since some of what we are dreaming draws from what is stored in our brain's memory banks and some of what we

⁸ It should be noted that neuroscience has shown that dreams occur during each REM ("rapid eye movement") cycle of the brain, a function that repeats itself numerous times during the course of a full sleep cycle.

⁹ For a full discussion of the neural-physiology of the brain, see Damasio, pp. 317-335.

¹⁰ Llinás, R. and Paré, D., **Of dreaming and wakefulness**, *Neuroscience*, 44, pp. 521-535, 1991.

¹¹ Damasio, pg. 318.

¹² We keep noting "may" since so much of what our brains create is never accessed by us consciously.

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are dreaming is the processing of the day's and the moment's experience. Our consciousness becomes informed by the dream, forever altered by its occurrence. What we recall is only a fragment of what our brain utilizes. What learning takes place, while not easily measured, is a real part of consciousness and a contribution to our intelligence. In fact, sleep studies have demonstrated that artificially presenting the brain with abstract reasoning tasks during dream states result in higher levels of abstract reasoning performance on those same tasks during the subsequent waking state¹³.

Organizational Intelligence: Freeing Creativity

A key element in the efficacy of using dream intelligence in organizations is the fact that there are striking parallels between the way in which individuals process information and the manner in which organizations manage knowledge. There are many ways of representing thinking in the dynamic life of organizations; the following is a simple construct to demonstrate what occurs and is adapted from the Johari Window¹⁴.

The Johari Window (below) provides a conceptual model for representing how information known to both self and others can be considered "free" knowledge. Information consciously¹⁵ known to the self, but not known to others, is "hidden". Furthermore, information not consciously known to the self yet known to others is "blind" to the self. Finally, information not consciously known to either the self or others is simply "unknown".

		Feedback	
		Known to the Organization (Others)	Not Known to the Organization (Others)
Disclosure	Known to Stakeholders (Self)	<i>Free</i>	Hidden
	Not Known to Stakeholders (Self)	Blind	<i>Unknown</i>

¹³ Smith, C., **What's in a Dream**, in Alda, A., (Nar.), Pieces of Mind, *Scientific American Frontiers*, Watertown, MA.: Chedd-Angier Production Company, Episode 703, January 22, 1997.

¹⁴ Johari Window, adapted from Joseph Luft, *Of Human Interaction*, Palo Alto, CA, National Press Books, 1969.

¹⁵ In this discussion, "consciousness" only refers to the "aware" state of the brain's processing.

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The key to freeing creativity in an organization begins with understanding how information is managed by a group of individuals. If applied to organizations, the Johari Window helps us to understand that the nature of conscious knowledge is freely available when consciously known to all, hidden when known to key stakeholders though not to the organization as a whole and blind when known to the organization though not to key persons. Finally, the “unknown” is that which is not available to the organization or to its members in ways that would support the development of new knowledge – the development of intelligence that is essential to innovation.

By tapping into “blind,” “hidden” and “unknown” realms of organizational knowledge, we access those sources of intelligence in the organization that are beyond the normal bounds of consciousness much in the same way that the dream accesses information in the brain. This is the knowledge that is below the surface in the three conscious states (aware, unaware and dreaming) that are not available¹⁶ or in the deeper non-attended portions of the brain that are pre-conscious. Making dreams available socially provides a mechanism to retrieve this information and make it available to free the organization from its normal operating dynamics, group processes and security needs that disable stakeholders and the organization itself in the quest of gain the intelligence which makes innovation possible. This is precisely the manner in which dream intelligence comes about.

Social Dreaming¹⁷

The technology that can release an organization’s creative processes, stimulate innovation and further change is Social Dreaming, an experiential process that frees the individual from survival needs in the present, linking the heart and mind to be available for revelation and epiphany¹⁸. Dreams are shared and freely associated to, collectively linking our thoughts and feelings, resulting in the de-construction of group relations that inhibit innovation. Meaning is then freed and discovered, co-creating new experience and understanding. A dreaming matrix emerges and a new knowledge community is formed.

The use of dreams as a means of understanding and developing organizational intelligence was originated by W. G. Lawrence nearly 20 year’s ago at the Tavistock Institute in London. Groups of people that explore what occur when they share and associate to their dreams in a structured and positive way resulted in astounding discoveries. Social Dreaming matrices have since shown that sharing and associating to dreams allows one to tap into organizational intelligence and successfully overcome security needs. In this way, Social Dreaming overcomes the systems dynamics that undermine efficiency and productivity and the release of creative energy. Dreaming socially is itself not a new discovery, since dreams have always been used by numerous societies, mostly communities of indigenous populations, such as the Sioux, Senoi, Masai

¹⁶ As in the dream or dream fragments quickly forgotten upon awakening, they were once available and lost once the “proto-self” is confronted by the prospect of managing in the “awake” state and once the proto-self is confronted and inhibited by the security needs stimulated by its context.

¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of Social Dreaming, see Lawrence, W. G., Editor, *Social Dreaming @ Work*, London: Karnac (Books) Ltd., 1999.

¹⁸ Lawrence, W. G., “**Won from the void and formless infinite**”: experiences of social dreaming, *Social Dreaming @ Work*, London: Karnac (Books) Ltd., 1999

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and Aborigines, to guide and manage the community in the collective, representing the whole community including its history, present and potential.

Contemporary organizations are plagued by complex dynamics that inhibit their ability to fully function and access the information that is contained within them. Providing a method for freeing an organization from its own dynamics, which take the form of resistance, in order to free its creative energy is no simple task. These dynamics, or security needs, exist within and outside of the bounds of awareness. Dream technology has been used by Lawrence, the authors and others as a means of helping people within organizations reach their untapped creativity and achieve innovative approaches to organizational dilemmas.

Dreams @ Work

So far, this paper has been looking at how linking an organization's cognitive, emotional and dream intelligence can lead to increased organizational intelligence. What follows are two case examples showing how the development of a Social Dreaming network had a dramatic impact on the capacity of two large organizations to harness creativity, to innovate and to change in reaction to environmental factors that threatened their existence. The first is a large entertainment media-manufacturing firm which found itself encumbered by obsolete production methods and the second is a financial services firm which was located in the World Trade Center when it was destroyed in September, 2001.

Case 1 – During a complex restructuring of a multi-national manufacturing company, in which manufacturing processes were being radically redesigned to improve efficiency and profitability, dreams were shared among the internal and external consultants charged with making the changes necessary for success¹⁹. In these dreams, the consultants became aware that workers were fearing that the change would cost them their jobs and that the system would be radically changed forever, disrupting 17 years of full employment, caring management and an atmosphere of family first. The external consultants were alarmed by these dreams and the understanding associated with them. They used this data to confront management about the unspoken, unknown dilemmas that the management faced. This breakthrough allowed the management to rethink their strategy and realize that not only was the new production system unable to sustain more than 50% of the current workforce. More importantly, the new system under development would not sustain the current management structure. Six months later, only six of the 21 executives in the leadership team and 1,500 of the nearly 4,000 employees remained, and the son of the founder of the business retired to be replaced by the first non-family CEO. Radical change that the organization could not face or come to terms with was exposed in the dreams of those charged with planning the transition and, once shared, enabled the organization to smoothly transition to a new way of life.

Case 2 – The following is a discussion of four dreams from a consultation with a firm affected by the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. This firm lost one-third of its employees when the 2nd tower was struck. The dreams come from two employees and one of the authors who is consulting to the firm. Of the two employees who shared their dreams, one escaped from the second Tower and the

¹⁹ For a fuller discussion of these dreams and the process, see Maltz., M. and Walker, E. M.

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other witnessed the devastation from the concourse. The dreams are shared in order of occurrence.

- **Dream 1: Synchronized Heart Beats** – “I had a disturbing dream the morning after my recent return from two weeks away in China on business for another client in November. In the dream, I am a passenger on one of the hijacked planes and I believe that if I could only synchronize the beating of my heart to all of the other passengers on all of the other hijacked planes, that we could slow the planes down and make them veer away from their targets. When I awoke from my panicked, anxious state in the dream, I could only think about the many folk who I had not seen for two weeks – their faces haunted me in that early morning. I felt as though I had failed in my role as consultant, that I had abandoned them by attending to other work. Or, had they abandoned me in my unconscious? For me, this dream was very much about what doing this work meant to me as well as what our work has meant to this firm. For the firm, we are in the business of synchronizing the hearts of those who survived in order to ensure a return to health and to ensure the caring for the many families devastated by this tragedy.”²⁰

The vivid imagery could be understood at many levels, including the wish on the part of the dreamer to have averted this trauma and the fantasy that he or someone had the power to stop it; the management of the dreamer’s guilt for attending to others; and, as a consultation to the dreamer to establish an understanding of what was actually occurring. In the context of this particular system, it is the job of the consultants to synchronize efforts for the families, the employees and the system as a whole. This knowledge exists within the dreamer yet is not accessible until after the dream (or perhaps through the dream). This dream, when shared, led to a changes within the consultation, for instance, the merging of employee support groups that were previously separated by experience into a single support group for the entire firm.

- **Dream 2: The Planes Keep Coming** – “I keep having the same repeating nightmare. We have bought a home on a mountain above a dam. I am sitting on our porch and I see a jet plane flying low, flying directly towards the dam. I realize it is a hijacked plane flying into the dam to destroy it. I also realize that once the dam is hit, the mountain will collapse and I might be killed.”

This dream is from a woman who is one of the sole survivors of her department. She observed the tragedy of the day from the concourse of the World Trade Center, including having burning debris fall on her and witnessing bodies falling from windows. In addition, she received a message on her home answering machine from one of her colleagues saying “goodbye”. Taken for the individual, the dream can be understood as guilt at being alive, disbelief that this occurred, vulnerability, etc. Though when shared with her new team, it highlighted how vulnerable the department was and how new people coming into the firm to fill

²⁰ From Maltz, M., **Finding You in Me: The Organizational Clinician, A Consultation to an Investment Bank that was in the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2002.**

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the seats of those lost were experienced as terrorists flying into the dam. The dam being her and her colleague who were holding the water back, keeping the department alive as it was being rebuilt. This shared learning enabled the group to begin working on the dynamic rift between old and new employees to ensure that the dam remained whole – to ensure that the security needs of both the new and the old were understood, respected and worked through in order to form a functional work-group.

- **Dream 3: My Boss is Alive and Well** – “This morning I awoke confused thinking that my boss was still alive. I had awoke from a dream in which he was sitting across from me in my new office, dressed casually as he would be dressed on a Friday. I was ecstatic in the dream asking him where he was, where he had been for the past five months. He responded that he had used the opportunity to have an affair with a woman and to think through a few things. Towards the end of the dream, I started to cry in front him with the joy of his being alive. In reality, I never really got along with my boss. He was always a bit hard on me.”

The dreamer was one of the few who managed to escape from the upper floors of the 2nd tower moments before it collapsed. He is also responsible for rebuilding a fledgling part of this firm’s business. The dream at the organizational level came to represent how the dreamer had so well internalized the manager; that he had become him. Hearing the dream, the group began to discuss how they could each contribute to each other’s role and enhance the whole and for the first time began to understand how to segment functions and align roles. The dream enabled the dreamer to explore further how the deceased manager had prepared him for this moment, giving him new confidence and initiating of a number of key improvements in his business segment.

- **Dream 4: The Distant Colleague** – “I am in my office and my [dead] colleague is alive and asking me what has been happening. I feel socially awkward with him. He feels reserved, cautious, not sure that he can trust me. We have a short and uncomfortable interaction. I am confused by our lack of rapport and find myself unable to say so to him.”

This dream is the dream of the firm. How do they integrate the memories and institutional learning from those that are now gone? How do they build on the internalized experience and knowledge of those they have lost and be whole again? These and other questions were difficult to raise and discuss. In sharing the dream, the group began the conversation of what and who was missing and how to rebuild. The integration of what was held inside of each, the knowledge and learning collected from the experience of working together with those who were now gone could be realized, discussed and mobilized in their rebuilding.

The imagery contained in these four dreams is not surprising given the context. Their use in open forums as a means of bringing understanding resulted in new knowledge and new initiatives that led to departmental learning and organizational change. Without these dream images being shared and associated to, the dreams would have remained in the realm of the forgotten fragment of dream consciousness or as a consciousness image that

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was disturbing for the dreamer and potentially contributing to the conscious nightmare the dreamers were living. Once shared, the dreams functioned as an integral part of the development of new organizational intelligence; an intelligence that helps heal grief and portend survival for the firm.

Conclusion

The process of sharing and associating to dreams in a social setting in which dreams are offered for the whole and not the individual is a direct means of bringing the imagery offered in the brain's dream-level consciousness to the foreground in the awake and aware state. Furthermore, doing so in an organizational setting will allow for breakthroughs in thinking that can lead to innovative approaches to organizational needs. We have presented the neurological evidence for dreams as one of three levels of consciousness (awake and aware, awake and unaware, and dreaming). We have offered the link between the brain's use of imagery as its primary mode of processing and imagery *as* the brain offers in its dream state. We have outlined a methodology for enabling creativity and innovation within organizations, a methodology that frees persons from the security needs that inhibit such thinking. Lastly, we have described how the ongoing work in Social Dreaming is the ideal methodology for unleashing creativity and innovation within groups and organizations.

Dream intelligence is an extension of cognitive and emotional intelligence and enhances our ability to perceive social dynamics and learn from experience. Although the dramatic imagery in the dreams from our second case example is understandable given the social context in which they occurred, they are not at all unusual. Again, once shared, the dreams functioned as an integral part of the development of new organizational intelligence, a means of moving from intense grief and anxiety to organizational learning that provides survival for both the individual and the firm. Social Dreaming provides newfound intelligence – dream intelligence – at the social systems level.

We believe that the ability to access the forgotten fragments of dream consciousness is a vital knowledge resource that organizations are currently wasting. Dreams and the intelligence captured within are freely available to all and, as we have seen, are key elements in the information environment that organizations ignore at their own peril. Gerald Zaltman has written on the importance of taking advantage of the brain's image processing capabilities in both management and marketing²¹. We need to ask ourselves why we are not using the intelligence freely available to us in our dreams in *all* aspects of organizational life.

²¹ Eakin, E., **Penetrating the Mind of Metaphor**, *The New York Times*, February 23, 2002.