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Evolving Leaders • Transforming Organisations

Rationale for System Dynamics Work

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For the most part, organisations do not need more ideas – they need better access to creative insight and the impulses that give rise to collective breakthrough. Systemic intelligence offers particular advantage to individuals and organisations striving for success in this 21st century of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The field of System Dynamics, in which systemic constellations and other modalities have important contributions to make, provides several ways of accessing this intelligence.

System Dynamics refers to the movements arising from interactions between inter-connected elements that, thereby, form a 'system'. To work skilfully with the manifestation of these forces requires an understanding of systemic principles and how they reveal themselves in living systems at many levels, such as personal, organisational, and societal.

The sign of a healthy system is the flow and vitality experienced when operating purposefully within it. Healthy dynamics produce a vitality that enables individuals and the collective to thrive. When systemic principles are compromised unhealthy dynamics arise. These unhealthy dynamics create 'disturbances' within the system, which show up as symptoms, problems or limitations to organisational performance.

It is common when there are problems in an organisation to examine them directly rather than from a systemic perspective. These problems are often personalised, making them about the people involved rather than their roles. This means that the less visible – yet more powerful – dynamics at play are usually overlooked. Through a systemic lens we can see the interaction of elements of the system being examined, or the related contextual systems to which that system belongs which may be driving any 'problems' being reported. This provides a broader picture of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for consultants and facilitators to consider with the client. This systemic view will also significantly influence a number of decisions: whether to take action or not, and where and how best to intervene.

Systemic constellation work is one modality we can use to help see the larger picture. A systemic constellation involves a language and processes that enable us to study presenting systemic patterns in service of the client organisation and its systemic health.

To do this work consultants need to be skilled in a range of approaches to systemic constellating, and to be able to recognise when constellations are not possible and/or if other systemic interventions are required.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF A HEALTHY ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEM

Purpose: For an organisation to exist it must have a purpose that serves society. Without a purpose an organisation will cease to exist. The purpose may be clear or unclear. It acts as a key organizing principle. Clearly articulated and understood by everyone in the organisation, purpose serves as the primary focus in all decision-making and management processes. When the purpose is clear the system relaxes and functional units and individual roles are able to more easily fit into the whole. This creates a healthy tension for individuals involved. Within us we also have our own work Purpose and this is continually evolving, as it is for the organisation. Therefore, the ongoing corporate clarity and understanding of Purpose also serves as a healthy boundary, or set of guidelines, for individuals to more easily articulate their growing work Purpose.





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Belonging: The simplest model of Belonging is what we know in family life. We all belong to a family and our biological roots. In organisations, Belonging applies to the value we have to offer in the system at this time. However, once someone has been a member of an organisation their contribution, be it positive or negative, always belongs, it is part of the fabric of the organization. Excluding or diminishing a person's contribution creates disturbance in the system and creates limitations. In Belonging, we also see seasons of mutual exchange come and go. The work places where our respective skills and experience best belong change with those seasons. Therefore, to practice healthy joining and leaving in organisational life is also essential for the system to maintain a healthy level of internal and external connectedness.

Order: speaks to knowing our place in the organisation's system. There can be different hierarchies depending on our history with the organization, the level of responsibility for the organisation & the competence we bring to an issue. When individuals, or departments, step into behaviours that are out of Order there can be many ripples of disharmony that negatively impact on performance. Orders can be quite fluid, if the orders get confused even people with the best of intentions run into trouble. Becoming more conscious of the systemic importance of Order and how it is easily disordered helps create more effective responses. How roles are named, for example, can play a big part in expanding or contracting the smoothness of operations.

Give & Take: Each system is always striving toward a healthy balance between Give & Take. There are different levels of give and take in different contexts, e.g. being new to something means you take more, being experienced means you give more. If we don't consciously work towards this balance, the system will do it for us. Worker revolts or union strikes are more dramatic examples, but every day we see parts of organisations exercising the energy of re-balance. Shareholders demanding higher dividends, management demanding higher productivity, workers demanding improved conditions or higher wages, and the many reciprocal pressures they each meet, are all expressions of Give & Take at work.

What is: As we examine these principles in action in any organisational situation, System Dynamics often presents data that simply seeks to be acknowledged as What Is. Without forming any judgment, the simple acknowledgement of truths, realities, or situations can resolve disturbing dynamics e.g. acknowledging the significance of a founder, acknowledging someone's contribution that has been overlooked, acknowledging a difficult decision and its previously unspoken impacts. During a major change program, such acknowledgement can help individuals or teams calibrate their contributions to ensure more successful outcomes. If important elements are ignored, the system will find a way of remembering them, often in significantly disruptive ways. It is often a powerful key for unlocking the energy needed to bring an organisation back to good health. You can see a surprising calming influence it has. The system is often trying to bring things out into the open that we are not seeing or have denied.

By developing a systemic lens we can fully leverage the systemic intelligence that is available. With awareness comes new perspectives and increased choices which enable us to release the flow in the system to achieve its purpose and potential.

To learn more set up a time to have a conversation with Sarah. To get in contact please email her EA, Leanne Imbro on ea@sarahcornally.com or call 02 9801 0659.

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