

Discussion Paper – For Interested Coaches and Consultants

Reflection On the Development of Facilitation Skills for Working with Organisational System Dynamics

Introduction

The Academy of System Dynamics is a not-for-profit think tank for professionals interested in growing their understanding of system dynamics and how to incorporate the language and techniques into their practices. There are three areas of work we particularly value:

- Collaborative learning practices such as peer supervision, attending and running workshops, and working together with clients.
- Developing a shared knowledge base to use in our individual and collaborative work.
- Experiencing, respecting, experimenting with and preserving the unique value of different models used in constellation and other work, with a commitment to enhance our learning and practice from understanding them and, where helpful, their synthesis.

This paper reflects some of our learning, thinking and wondering.

A. Rationale for system dynamics work

It is our belief that 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. Further, we believe that 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 to directly examine problems arising in an organisation rather than to observe from a systemic perspective. These problems are often personalised, making them about the people involved rather than their roles. This can mean that the less visible – yet more powerful – dynamics at play are 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 'problems' being reported. This examination 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.

B. Some notes on 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.

Belonging: The simplest model of Belonging is what we know in family life. We all belong to a family and to 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: Order speaks to knowing our place in the organisation's system. There can be different hierarchies depending on our history with the organization, our 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 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.

C. Some differences Between Organisational and Family System Dynamics

1. Organisations have a societal purpose, and this purpose can change.
2. The goal of the organisation can be redefined.
3. There is a differentiation between the person and the role they fill.
4. There are many elements in organisation that don't exist in families; organisational structure, geography, regions, divisions, functions, strategies, products, policies, processes etc.
5. Belonging is contextual and relates to the value or contribution you have to offer the system. It's nature changes.
6. Borders in organisational systems are not always clearly defined, hence the principles of order are not as easily distinguished, e.g. in matrixes, in shared roles, project roles, collaborations, joint ventures etc.
7. There are more fluid orders which impact in terms of enabling the organisation: hierarchy/ responsibility, history/longevity, and competence.
8. Exchange – give and take - has a special significance in organisations. Give and take is more than the explicit contract; it is a generous exchange on all levels. The enterprise is dependent upon exchange with employees, customer and stakeholders. The give and take needs to be dignifying.
9. Confidentiality due to market sensitivity or reputation of the subjects being examined.
10. Organisational concepts and language.
11. Often 'the work' is not about setting up a constellation in the room or with the client – but rather about bringing an organisational systemic perspective and thus bringing a systemic lens to an interview, conversation, recommendation, or consulting activity etc.

D. What do you need to do this work?

In our collective training and experience, the members of ASD have observed a number of factors that shape the capacity of any one person to facilitate this work powerfully in organisational settings. Our understanding is in constant development. The following summary of these factors, offered only as a guide for discussion, are grouped into the three areas we consider most relevant to a person's capacity to facilitate this work;

- 1. Organisational Expertise and Experience**
- 2. Personal 'Being-ness',**
- 3. Skills, tools and techniques.**

1. Organisational Expertise and Experience

What do you need to know and to have done to be a skilful facilitator of systemic constellations?

It seems critical that facilitators have a reasonable level of expertise and experience in leading change or development initiatives within organisations. As part of this experience it is help if facilitators:

- a) Have a level of expertise in other bodies of organisational knowledge to bring to systemic work (e.g. Organisational Development principles and tools).
- b) Are fluent in speaking organisational language – i.e. the perception and language of executives & business systems.
- c) Have developed the capacity to lead and support the education and 'buy-in' of clients to engage in System Dynamics work. This means they can recognise that there is no pre-determined blueprint 'answer' and have the capability to sit in the space of the unknown.
- d) Have a reasonable knowledge of the systems they work with; e.g. health issues, organisational issues, history of society for societal issues, Australian business context – to ensure that the necessary insight, language and domain of experience are present.

- e) Can demonstrate an awareness of their role as a steward of the systemic process in service of the system and thus reveal hidden dynamics that have an impact on systemic health. They have a clear appreciation that the facilitation of insight and of 'letting the truth speak', is the primary goal, rather than any 'fixing' or the providing of 'solutions'.
- f) Can link the nature and benefit of this work to clear organisational goals and deliverables sought by the client.
- g) Have experience with and engagement in supervision and/or a community of practice.

2. Personal 'Being-ness'

How do you need to 'BE' as a skilful facilitator of systemic constellations?

A person's capacity to facilitate this work well in organisations seems to be shaped and enhanced by their ability to:

- a) Hold a facilitation space that is free from judgment.
- b) Bring a systemic lens, which is expansive and inclusive.
- c) Let go of a typical consulting perspective that is usually analytical and differentiating.
- d) Stay connected with their core self and sense of purpose.
- e) Access the humility and focus to serve as a guest in the house of the system; not an authority or one with answers.
- f) Work from an 'empty centre', not knowing and 'presencing', to work phenomenologically.
- g) Draw on a mindfulness practice that supports feeling the system's energy while staying connected with the client's question or issue.
- h) Sense and monitor the energy active in a constellation, recognise and 'hold' the size of the system and the issues within the system that are being addressed.
- i) Carry curiosity and openness to learning – including the acquiring and letting go of knowledge, experience and frameworks of understanding.
- j) Bring an active appreciation of their own family of origin context, and history within organisations to enable them to manage their compulsions and blind spots. (To do this work well we need to mindfully manage the urge for parentification and attachment to helping that consultants may bring to their work.)
- k) Recognise that the issues each person needs to face into will tend to be present in the clients they attract. (The valency in facilitator's system will tend to present in the systems of those with whom they work.)
- l) Bring awareness of their own consciousness and how that impacts on their capability to work at different levels of intervention.
- m) Be confident in holding the space while being willing to disappoint.

3. Skills, tools and techniques.

What skills, tools and processes do you need to have available as a skilful facilitator of systemic constellations?

A person's capacity to facilitate this work well in organisations seems also to be shaped and enhanced by the extent to which they have:

- a) A foundation in family constellation work including base principles, tools and approaches, enabling a strong place within their own family of origin.
- b) A foundation in organisational constellation work, with a strong understanding of the differences between it and family work.
- c) A range and number of processes, approaches and tools to apply and test in the work which enable them to develop hypotheses as well as shift and change approaches in line with what is showing itself in the system.
- d) The ability to discern how issues present in systems across the spectrum from family to

personal to organisational and to social.

- e) The ability to track and remember the language and different movements of the system being examined.
- f) A framework and the ability to hold the polarities of Agency (Bringing knowledge or a point of view) and Community (Co-creation) to balance personal authority and collective authority.
- g) The development of a personal signature approach to the work based on their own heritage.

E. The 'Arc of Development'

Recognising the level of complexity in the above 3 domains, it is clear that a practitioner would experience an 'Arc of Development' – a transformation, or inner journey through their involvement in learning this work with development of their capability over time.

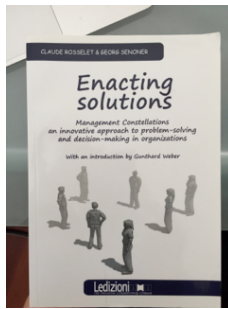
This Arc of Development can be traversed through activities configured to grow capability and mastery in the 3 domains. These could include;

1. One-day workshops offered by practitioners to personally experience this work and learn some basic principles.
2. Setting up own family system and do some work to understand the system dynamics at play in own system.
3. Systemic Constellation Facilitator Training. Typically multiple day trainings run over a year, or a series of workshops that teach concepts, principles and methods using a highly experiential approach that includes practice sessions.
4. 3 – 5 day training events run by experienced skilful practitioners (Some in specialty areas such as trauma). In these sessions it is possible to develop a personal systemic approach as well as experience different approaches and styles to broaden and enhance practice.
5. Practice sessions.
6. Experimentation.
7. Intensives (such as the 4th Australasian Constellation Intensive in February 2018) where most of these elements are concentrated.
8. Peer supervision around any aspect of practice or development in this work.
9. Working with clients.
10. Private study.

We look forward to further enhancing our knowledge of the 'arc of development' with input from others as the activities of the Academy develop.

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References (a sample of what is available)			
<p>Articles and links on our web-site: http://www.academyoforganisationsystemdynamics.com.au</p> <p>For background to 'system dynamics', here are some interesting clips to check out on YouTube:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Senge - Navigating Webs of Interdependence • Murmation - starlings on Otmoor • Rupert Sheldrake on Morphic Fields and Systemic Family Constellations • What's invisible? More than you think - John Lloyd 			
Books for constellation work and organisations			
	<p><i>Fields of Connection: The practice of organisational constellations</i></p> <p>By Jan Jacob Stam</p> <p>Publisher Uitgeverij Het Noorderlicht, 2006.</p> <p>ISBN 9789077290088</p>		
	<p><i>Systemic Consultancy in Organisations: concepts – tools – innovations</i></p> <p>By Roswita Konigswieser and Martin Hillebrand</p> <p>Publisher Carl-Auer, 2005.</p> <p>ISBN 3896704990</p>		
	<p><i>Invisible dynamics : systemic constellations in organisations and in business</i></p> <p>By Klaus P. Horn and Regine Brick ; translated by Colleen Beaumont.</p> <p>Publisher Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag, 2005.</p> <p>ISBN 9783896704917</p>		

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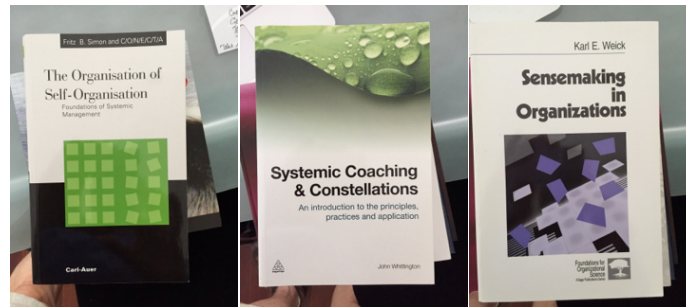


Enacting Solutions, Management Constellations: an Innovative Approach to Problem-Solving and Decision-Making in Organizations

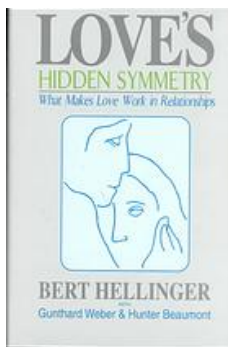
By Georg Senoner, Claude Rosselet

Publisher Ledizioni, 2013

ISBN 9788867050826



Books for constellation work and families and individuals



Love's Hidden Symmetry : what makes love work in relationships

By Bert Hellinger, Gunthard Weber, Hunter Beaumont

Publisher Zeig, Tucker & Co, 1998.

ISBN 1891944002

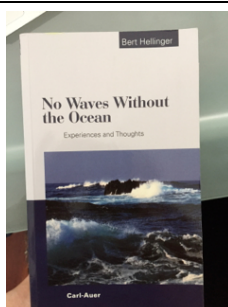


Even if it Costs Me My Life: systemic constellations and serious illness

By Stephan Hausner, translated by Colleen Beaumont

Publisher Gestalt Press, 2011.

ISBN 9780415898058



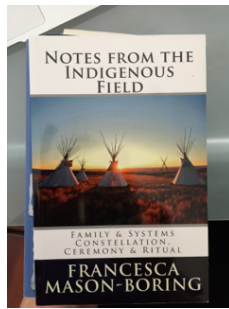
No Waves Without the Ocean

By Bert Hellinger

Publisher Carl Auer, 2006

ISBN 9783896705488

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Notes From The Indigenous Field: family & systems constellation, ceremony & ritual

By Francesca Mason Boring

Publisher Createdspace, 2011

ISBN 9781460986424

