Adaptive Action: Leveraging Uncertainty in Your Organization

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You Can’t Manage What You Can’t See
Future of Management

The world is becoming more ...
- Focused on performance
- Interdependent
- Unpredictable
- Global
- Diverse
- Fast-paced
- Power balanced
- Heterarchical
- Resource-constrained

So management must be more ...
- Focused on performance
- Flexible
- Inquiry-based
- Systemic
- Adaptive
- Agile
- Participative
- Creative
- Sustainable
HSD Assumptions

• Some things you have always done will continue to work—you just don’t know which ones.
• You have to be uncertain about your certainty.
• Complex truth opens the door to productive dialogue.
• Systems self-organize.
• Your job is to set conditions so they organize to serve your purpose.
Complex Adaptive System (CAS)  
Self-Organizing System

A collection of individual agents who have the freedom to act in unpredictable ways, and whose actions are interconnected such that they produce system-wide patterns.
Agents interact

Those system-wide patterns, in turn, influence the behaviors of the agents

System-wide patterns emerge

Agents interact
What Is Management in a CAS?

Adaptive Action to influence conditions for self-organizing
Adaptive Action

What are conditions right now?

Now what will shift conditions?

So what patterns emerge?
Conditions for Self-Organizing Patterns

Container
Container

- What?
  Holds agents together until they form patterns

- So what?
  Influences speed and clarity of patterns:
  - Large & loose container gives slow and messy patterns
  - Small & tight container gives fast and clear patterns
Container

- Now what?
  - Add more
  - Take some away
  - Make them more/less visible
  - Make them more/less permeable
Container: Beware!

- Multiple & simultaneous
- Diverse, not all visible
- Massively entangled
- Invisible to dominant view
- Require resources to sustain
- Shift without warning
Conditions for Self-Organizing Patterns
Differences

• What?
  Forms pattern AND sets potential for change

• So what?
  Influences speed and clarity of patterns:
  • Many & small differences give slow and messy patterns
  • Few & right-sized differences give fast and clear patterns
Differences

• Now what?
  • Introduce new ones
  • Ignore/exaggerate old ones
  • Focus on ones that make a difference
Differences: Beware!

- Various, not all visible
- Multiple levels—organization, team, individual
- Right number & right size
- Differences that make a difference
- Some you can influence, others you can’t
Conditions for Self-Organizing Patterns

Exchanges
Exchanges

• What?
  Connect across differences

• So what?
  Influences speed and clarity of patterns:
  • Few & loose exchange gives slow and messy patterns
  • Many & tight exchange gives fast and clear patterns
Exchanges

• Now what?
  • Add new ones
  • Stop old ones
  • Change existing ones
Exchange: Beware!

- Many kinds—some more powerful than others
- Explicit & implicit
- Intentional & unintentional
- Past, present & future
- Design:
  - Width
  - Length
  - Direction
  - Dynamic
More resources

• **Books**
  - Facilitating Organization Change (Olson & Eoyang)
  - Coping with Chaos (Eoyang)
  - Patterns (Holladay & Quade)
  - Adaptive Action: Leveraging Uncertainty in Your Organization (Eoyang & Holladay)

• **Web**
  - www.adaptiveaction.org
  - Wiki.hsdinstitute.org
  - www.hsdinstitute.org
  - Hsdcommunity.ning.com
  - Twitter: #hsd #adaptact @GlendaEoyang
Even More Resources

• Training
  • Webinars (free monthly)
  • HSD Professional Certification (Portland, 2013)
  • Custom training

• Adaptive Action Laboratories
  • Focus on your own sticky issues
  • Learn HSD models and methods
  • Build adaptive capacity for individuals and groups
  • Involve large groups or small
  • Address major issues or “trivial”
  • Commit to half-day to three-day sessions
You CAN Manage What You CAN See